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Ethnic Community Development Organization (ECDO) is a nonprofit voluntary development organization, working for the welfare of various ethnic communities in Sylhet region. which is organized by some individuals from different ethnic groups

Celebration of 'World Indigenous Day 2005'



ECDO celebrated World Indigenous Day 2005 with a full spirit of wellbeing for the ethnic people of Sylhet region. This program has become a milestone for the different ethnic communities of greater Sylhet region because it is the first time that this important day has taken place in the Sylhet region. All ethnic community leaders showed their deep support and gratefulness to ECDO for taking such a great initiative. More than five hundred people from different ethnic communities of Sylhet region participated spontaneously in this event. Among others, civil society men, university teachers, human right activists, NGO representatives, political activists etc. were also present on the occasion. The event was supported by Voluntary Service Overseas and ECDO expressed thanks to VSO for enabling such a successful project.

In light of this World Indigenous Day's theme "Indigenous Peoples Have the Right to Self-determination" colorful banners, festoons, placards, posters etc. were carried by the indigenous people in a spontaneous colorful rally. The rally was inaugurated by the Deputy Commissioner of Sylhet district. Ethnic people from the Garo, Khasi, Patro, Manipuri and Tea garden community of Sylhet region participated in the rally, which moved throughout the main streets of the city with traditional garbing, songs and dances.

After the successful completion of the rally an open discussion session was held in M Saifur Rahaman auditorium of the city. The discussion session was presided over by Mr. Lakshmikanta Singh Executive Director of ECDO and Mr. Badar Uddin Ahmed Kamran honorable mayor of Sylhet city corporation was present as chief guest. Among other Dr. Tulshi Kumar Das and Mr. Paisal Ahmed of Social Work Department at Shahjalal University of Science and Technology. Mr. Mahtabul Hakim Program Manager of VSO Bangladesh, Mr. A. K. Sheram, poet, researcher and advisor of ECDO and Mr. Erfanuzzaman Chowdhury divisional coordinator of BLAST were present as special guests.

Mr. K Biroral Singh Secretary of ECDO was first to address the audience with his welcoming speech. This was followed by emotional and touching speeches by the Indigenous leader Mr.Parimal Baraik of tea-workers community, Mr.Gourango Patro of Patro community, Mr. Shankar Mrong of Garo community, and G.D Suchiang Kordor of Khasi community. All of them described the severity and extent of exploitation and torture they experienced frequently both from the government and mainstream people and they urged co-operation from all comers of the society to protect their human rights and preserve their rich culture, heritage and livelihood. They also demanded constitutional rights of the indigenous people.

In his speech Mr. Paisal Ahmed, assistant professor of Social Work at Shahjalal University urged civil society men, researchers and human rights activists to make indigenous peoples problems public. He also requested indigenous people to unite and fight against discrimination. Mr. Irfanuzzaman Chowdhury of BLAST offered legal assistance for indigenous peoples. Mr. A.K. Sheram stressed the need to preserve indigenous culture and language arguing that many of the indigenous languages are slowly diminishing. Mr. Mahtabul Hakim of VSO Bangladesh explained global circumstances of the indigenous peoples and stressed intensive collaborative efforts for a better life of the indigenous peoples throughout the world. Dr. Tulshi Kumar Das emphasized the mass concern about indigenous people's problems. He also said that civil society men can play an active role in protecting indigenous peoples from discrimination and exploitation.

In his speech Mr. Badar Uddin Ahmad Karman, honorable mayor of Sylhet City Corporation mentioned the great contribution of the indigenous peoples for building a national socio-economic foundation. He described indigenous distinct cultures as an asset to the country, which has created a multi dimensional cultural character in Bangladesh. He urged all people to be sensitive towards indigenous people's problems. Executive Director of ECDO Mr. Lakshmikanta Singh showed his gratefulness and thanked all the participants who made the program successful. After the discussion session and lunch break, a fascinating cultural show was launched for the audience. Artists of the Manipuri, Khasi and tea-worker community performed attractive dances and songs that were highly enjoyable and appreciated by the whole audience.

Louise Mary Elizabeth Saunderson Joins ECDO



On 1st week of November 2005, Louise Mary Elizabeth has joined ECDO as part of a partnership program with ECDO and Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO) Bangladesh. She is working as Communication and Sponsorship Officer. Primarily, she has been appointed for one year. Within this duration, she will visit working areas of ECDO, interact with the ethnic people and observe their situation. Identifying their problems, she will help ECDO in making different work plans and programs for the targeted ethnic people. To make ECDO's mission more successful and effective she will assist ECDO whole-heartedly.

Distribution of educational materials by ECDO

(a) Mokam Punjee reg. primary school, Jaintapur, Sylhet:



As part of ECDO's regular cost free education materials distribution mission, materials were distributed among the children of different ethnic communities at Mokam Punjee registered primary school, located in Jaintapur Upazilla of Sylhet district. This program was organized on March 15th, 2005. Professor M. Habibur Rahman, former Vice Chancellor of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology was present as chief guest of the occasion. The program was presided over by Mr. Lakshmikanta Singh, Executive Director of ECDO. Among others, Mrs. Momtaz

Sultana, assistant director of social service department of Sylhet was present as a special guest, Mr. Biplob Das thana fisheries officer, cultural personality Mr. Anil Kishan Singha and Headmaster of Mokam Punjee registered primary school Mr. Nurul Amin were also present. Professor Rahman emphasized how educated children are a real asset for the family and the importance of education. He noted that without education, the community cannot improve. Mrs. Momtaz Sultana stressed the importance of participating in the children's education. She asserted that there should be no discrimination based on gender or disability and that there should be equal opportunities of education. The work of ECDO was, therefore greatly appreciated as it has started to address the inherent problems in indigenous community education.

The Executive Director of ECDO stated that in the next annual examination, good performing students would be awarded dress as a gift from ECDO despite its limited ability. He said that this incentive may have created a competitive environment among the students, which will improve their education status. He, sought support and cooperation from community people to make this project more successful. Education materials were distributed among the children of Khasi ethnic community.

(b) Songram and Noxiar punjee government primary school, Goainghat, Sylhet:

The Khasi villages are located in East Jaflong of Goainghat Upazilla. ECDO distributed education materials and oral saline free of cost among the students of the aforementioned schools

The majority of students from both schools lived in remote areas and were among the poorest of the Khasi community. The program was presided over by Mr. Lakshmikanta Singh Executive Director of ECDO. Goainghat Upazilla education officer Mr. Moshorrof Hossain was present as a chief guest. Among others, Mr. Ghanes Rang sai and Mr. Baneal Lamin from Khasi community and Headmasters of the two schools' were present as special guests. Guardians of the students were also present at the occasion. Chief guest Mr. Moshorrof appreciated ECDO's initiative and discussed how collaborative effort with the government will help poor ethnic students substantially. Teachers have noticed that after launching this program by ECDO the quality of education has substantially increased among their students. They requested an extended program from ECDO so that all of the students can benefit by receiving education materials free of cost. They suggested that as most of the students are poor, all should be included within this program so that students can receive education at marginal cost. Khasi community leader Mr. Baneal Lamin stressed community cooperation and participation to make ECDO's initiative more successful. He assured ECDO that Khasi community would provide full cooperation so that ECDO can work freely among their community people. Executive Director of ECDO Mr. Lakshmikanta Singh thanked Mr. Lamin and requested community people to cooperate with ECDO. Mr. Robi Kiron Singh program organizer of ECDO directed the whole program.

Workshop on personal hygiene and cleanliness for School going Children

ECDO introduced the personal hygiene and cleanliness program on the 30th April 2005. The main aim of this program is to make students aware of their personal hygiene, sanitation and to emphasize the importance of using pure water for any purpose etc. As part of this program, ECDO arranged a program at Mokam Punjee registered primary school of Jaintapur Upazilla on April 30, 2005. During the workshop, the importance of hygiene sanitation, the definition of safe water and its importance were discussed at length. Additionally, methods of preventing water contamination and diseases caused by poor sanitation were discussed. Headmaster Mr. Nurul Amin who was present at the event stated that most of the children are not aware of their personal hygiene and are frequently affected by different contaminated diseases. The program was therefore very important in helping them to improve their health situation and Headmaster Mr. Nurul Amin greatly appreciated ECDO's initiative.

Workshop on HIV/AIDS



A workshop on HIV/AIDS was organized on May 8, 2005 with the people of Noxiar Punjee. The workshop was conducted by Nong poklai Sinha Counsellor of ECDO. The inhabitants of this punjee are mainly involved in stone collection and crashing related activities. Truck drivers and allied workers frequently visit this area from different parts of the country and punjee people have a good interaction with people outside of their community. Therefore, ECDO identified this area as high risk for HIV / AIDS

contamination and arranged a workshop with the younger and adult population. Both males and females were participants of the workshop. The cause and effect of this deadly disease, methods of protection and safety measures were discussed between the participants and ECDO's trained workers. Spontaneous participation made this workshop fruitful. Almost all of the participants discussed and shared their opinion freely. It should be noted that being located this close to the border zone and with a very high migratory movement across the border; the Khasis are at high risk for HIV/AIDS. ECDO has taken this reality seriously and frequently distribute leaflets and posters among the Khasis to increase awareness.

Free Medical Camp



Free Medical Camps were arranged in different Khasi villages of Goainghat and Jaintapur Upazilla under the health program of ECDO. Two local club's Songram Punjee and Mokam Punjee club were selected as venues due to their close proximity to the Khasi and Patro inhabited areas. Two camps served people throughout the day with cost , free medicine and diagnosis. The camps were inaugurated by Dr. Shibir Ahmed Shibli, head of the community

medicine department at Sylhet MAG Osmani Medical College. Dr. Shadhin Kumar Das, Dr. Chai and Dr. Shemel served the poor and disadvantaged patients. Both children and adults were given treatment. More than two hundred people benefited from the medical camp. Local community leaders were present on the occasion and showed their gratefulness towards ECDO's initiatives. ECDO would like to thank the civil surgeon of Sylhet for his kind support by providing cost free medicine for the camps. It should be noted that this is an ongoing program and ethnic people are continuously benefiting from this project.

Representative of VSO Bangladesh visited ECDO's office and project areas



Mr. Mahtabul Hakim, Program Manager of VSO Bangladesh visited ECDO's office and project areas on 11th and 12th of June 2005: He visited Songram Punjee project areas and made contact with the local people to find out about ECDO's initiatives. He also observed the problems and situations of the Khasi people and talked freely with the Khasi people. Additionally, he visited Mokam Punjee area and shared his views with the Khasi community leaders of the area. Mr. Hakim met with the workers of ECDO and discussed with them about the present activities, future plans, achievements, and limitations etc. of the organization. He also had a long discussion with ECDO's consultant Mr. Faisal Ahmmed on various aspects of the organization and targeted ethnic peoples needs and problems. He thanked Executive Director of ECDO and assured him that VSO will extend its full cooperation within their capacity.

Pre Focus Group Discussion to develop Indigenous Community Project

A Pre Focus Group Discussion was held at Caritas Office on 14th November, 2005, to develop a project for Indigenous Communities in the Sylhet region. The discussion was organized by ECDO and facilitated by Caritas. The pre Focus Group Discussion was organized as a preliminary meeting for Manipuri and Khasi community leaders to discuss their needs and issues and identify which ones should be prioritized.

The disadvantaged position of all indigenous communities was summarized by Celestine Shishir, Divisional Coordinator of Caritas Sylhet. "Adivasis always feel insecure in terms of politics, land and economic conditions. They feel that Bangladesh is not their country, but yet have spent their whole life living here." Khasi community leaders identified the following issues as the most important; land rights, education and employment.

Land

Khasi people are increasing day by day but there is no form of sustenance. For the development of the community, there should be more land as they depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, however the Government and mainstream society are taking land from the community. A self created problem was identified that some Khasi people are selling their land to mainstream people to make money. The consequence of this is infiltration of mainstream society into the Khasi village.

Education

The problem is that Khasi people are reluctant to invest their money in children's education. The teachers and facilities are in great need of improvement.

Many children cannot complete their education as high school is too expensive. It is mainly in Bangla medium which results in their own culture deteriorating.

To increase employment opportunities of Khasi people, cultural resource education, technical education and resource development education should be focused on.

Employment

The younger generation of the community do not have adequate opportunities for employment and suffer from frustration. Additionally, Khasi community do not know the market price for selling their own goods, and are cheated by mainstream society. A common market was identified as a way of overcoming this problem.