

# Equal rights and opportunities for Dalits and Adivasis

## Context

Bangladesh has witnessed an economic upswing in recent years, recording major social advances in areas such as healthcare and education. But this is not benefiting the entire population. The Dalits, referred to as casteless, and the Adivasis, who are original inhabitants, face social exclusion and discrimination. Their fundamental human rights are being flouted and they are being bypassed by economic growth.

HEKS/EPER support is directed to these social, ethnic and religious minorities and focuses on the north-western part of the country which is home to some 1.5 million Dalits and 350 000 Adivasis. Individual projects under the Country Programme aim to raise living standards on the one hand, and to foster equality and justice for marginalized minorities on the other. Other crucial issues are education and capacity-building for these disadvantaged people. HEKS/EPER also provides emergency relief and reconstruction aid following natural disasters.

## Objectives, priorities, activities

To accord Dalits and Adivasis equal rights and opportunities, HEKS/EPER is active in the fields of advocacy, income support, education and health, disaster resilience and climate change adaptation. HEKS/EPER helps Dalits and Adivasis to organise themselves into village committees and human rights networks as well as to claim their rights. At the economic level, cattle and poultry farmers organise themselves into producer groups and network with other market players. Dalit and Adivasi children receive preschool lessons as well as extra tuition in order to enhance their educational prospects. Much emphasis is also placed on providing education in health and hygiene matters. HEKS/EPER supports Dalit and Adivasi communities





when it comes to measures to protect against natural disasters. This is done through participatory awareness-raising and risk analysis exercises, the imparting of knowledge about climate change and support for building work.

### **Target groups**

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Some 40 000 Dalits and Adivasis benefit from the activities of the Country Programme. The lobbying work and advocacy campaigns are improving the situation of all Dalits and Adivasis in north-western Bangladesh.

### **Partnerships, networks, alliances, memberships**

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HEKS/EPER works with one international and five local partner organizations in Bangladesh. The partners working in north-western Bangladesh are the Eco Social Development Organization (ESDO), Gram Bikash Kendra (GBK), the Association for Rural Cooperation (ARCO), the Network of Non-mainstream Marginalized Communities (NNMC) and Promoting Inclusion of Discriminated Groups through Institutional Mechanisms (PIDIM). In Bangladesh, HEKS/EPER is a member of Act Alliance, the Market Development Forum and the INGO Knowledge Network. Besides, HEKS/EPER maintains close relations with other international and Swiss NGOs and with international organizations such as UNDP.

### **HEKS/EPER on the ground**

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HEKS operates a Coordination Office in Dhaka staffed by a coordinator and six other persons.

### **Topics and working approach**

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Human rights are the highest priority in all projects. The Dalit and Adivasi communities are being strengthened such that they can claim their own rights and be treated as equal members of society. Local and national authorities and government bodies are held accountable and use is being made of existing state-run poverty alleviation programmes. To boost the incomes of beneficiaries, they are put in touch with various market players so as to gain access to knowledge, resources and markets.

**Country:** Bangladesh

**HEKS/EPER No.:** 361.000

**Responsibility:**

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