

# Socio-economic Condition of Plain Land Tribal People in Bangladesh

Arook Toppo<sup>1</sup>, Md. Redwanur Rahman<sup>1</sup>, Md. Yeamin Ali<sup>1</sup>, Akib Javed<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Institute of Environmental Science, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

<sup>2</sup>Department of Geography and Environmental Studies, University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh

## Email address:

arook\_toppo.rrro@caritasbd.org (A. Toppo), redwan\_rahman@lycos.com (M. R. Rahman), yeaminiesru@gmail.com (M. Y. Ali), akib.jr@gmail.com (A. Javed)

## To cite this article:

Arook Toppo, Md. Redwanur Rahman, Md. Yeamin Ali, Akib Javed. Socio-economic Condition of Plain Land Tribal People in Bangladesh. *Social Sciences*. Vol. 5, No. 4, 2016, pp. 58-63. doi: 10.11648/j.ss.20160504.12

**Received:** July 25, 2016; **Accepted:** August 8, 2016; **Published:** August 31, 2016

---

**Abstract:** The purpose of the paper is to depict socio-economic condition of tribal people. The research is based on some primary data, which are collected from a structured questionnaire survey, interview, observation and focus group discussion and also on some secondary data which are collected from different sources. It is found that among tribal people, 60.94% households are involved in agricultural day labor activities. Around 22.14% household depend on their own cultivable land for production, 5.99% in various formal and non-formal service sectors (Offices support staff, Security guard and Garments factory), 2.34% of total sample HHs are involved in livestock rearing. 2.86% tribal households were found involved with small business activities (Petty shop, tea stall). Among the Mahali and Roabidas tribal community have their own tradition occupation *e.g.* cobbler, bamboo material small cottage *etc.* Regarding average monthly income of the households, majority (50.26%) of the households are up to 4000.00 BDT (US\$ 50) per month. Only 3.13% reported that their income is more than 6000.00 BDT ( $\leq$  US\$ 75).

**Keywords:** Socio-economic, Tribal People, Plain Land, Bangladesh

---

## 1. Introduction

The country report of Human Development Report [1] focuses the recent environmental problems of Bangladesh. According to the report Bangladesh has pursued the economic growth without acknowledging the cost to the environment and the poor people. The result has been undermining of the environment and already fragile natural resources base, up on which a majority of the country's population directly depend for their livelihood and well-being. Most importantly the tribal people faced lots of problem those who depended on natural resources beside this it makes their socio-economic condition vulnerable. The growing population of the country puts serious pressure on land, water, forest and other natural resources.

Since the ancient time, many tribal communities have been living in the in Bangladesh. Majority of these tribal people are landless. They belong to different groups like Santal, Oraon, Mahali, Pahan *etc.* These communities have own

distinct identities, unique languages, separate culture and food habit.

The important linkage between poverty reduction, livelihood promotion of tribal and natural resources conservation is well recognized by the development thinkers, researcher. Poverty reduction efforts must consider and address the poverty-environment and natural resources issues simultaneously because natural resources and environment give the essential basis and elements for economic activities and livelihood option of the population of a society.

Traditionally, the livelihoods of these tribal groups are based on their access to the surrounding natural environment and its resources. Now their livelihoods are being damaged due to market economies. Ethnic communities are a part of the ultra-poor and live in highly food insecure areas. More than 80 percent of the ethnic population live in rural areas and depends on agriculture and natural resources for their survival.

In Bangladesh, ethnic or indigenous people like Chakma,

Marma, Garo, Monipuri, Santal and others consume some molluscan species as food sources.

A tribal economy should always be characterized by the collection of their social, institutional, technological and finally economic arrangements through which the community seeks to enhance their materials and social well-being. There is always an interaction between the environment in which the community lives and their practices that led to sustain their livelihood. Natural environment, surrounding the people, provides several goods, services and amenities to them.

There are approximately 263,891,000 indigenous people distributed over 6 continents and in more than 85 countries, and representing about 4 percent of the world's population [2].

Bangladesh occupied of many tribal communities. There is no exact number and names of the tribal people with population. There are confusions about the number of tribal groups in Bangladesh. Acquisition and Tenancy Act 1950 considered following twenty-two tribal communities in Bangladesh [3].

The accurate number of tribal people in Bangladesh is uncertain. According to the Bangladesh *Khudra Nregosthi Sankskritic Prothithan Ain* [4] officially declared that there are 27 different tribal groups spread out across the national territory with the north, north-west and north-east, southeast region.

Bangladesh is the home of many tribal communities. There is no exact number and names of the tribal people with population. There are 45 different indigenous communities were mentioned [5].

The study aim is to know about the socio-economic condition of plain land tribal people. The purpose of the paper is to find out the income, occupational and holding health condition of tribal people who live in Bangladesh.

## 2. Methodology

The study is explorative and to some extent descriptive in nature that enforces to adopt mixed with qualitative and quantitative data as well as secondary and primary data. The primary data was collected from a structured questionnaire, interviews, focus group discussion and observations. The secondary data was collected from different sources. The questionnaire survey was conducted based on purposive sampling which includes 384 respondents. The primary data was analyzed by the different statistical software.

### Study area

The study area is especially known as *Barind Tract* area of Bangladesh. It is a largest Pleistocene physiographic unit of the Bengal Basin; covering an area of about 7,770 sq. km. geographically this area lies roughly between latitudes 24°20'N and 25°35'N and longitudes 88°20'E and 89°30'E (Figure 1). The Karatoya to the east, the Mahananda to the west, and the northern bank of the Ganga to the South and Punarbhaba rivers are the main of this area. The *Barind Tract* covers most parts of the greater Rajshahi Chapainawabgonj,

and Naogaon districts of Rajshahi division.

In this study, researcher tried to understand the socio-economic condition of tribal people of Bangladesh. Researcher collected information of socio-economic condition of tribal people with the help of Caritas. Caritas is one of the important organizations in Bangladesh that works with tribal people. We completed the study with tribal people with the help of Caritas in Rajshahi region.

## 3. Result and Discussion

In Rajshahi division (present day both Rangpur and Rajshahi division), according to the government survey report [6], the total number of Adivasi was 12, 05, 978 which is only 1.03 percent of the total population. In the last census of Bangladesh government [7], total tribal population is 1586,141 which is 1.10 per cent of the total population.

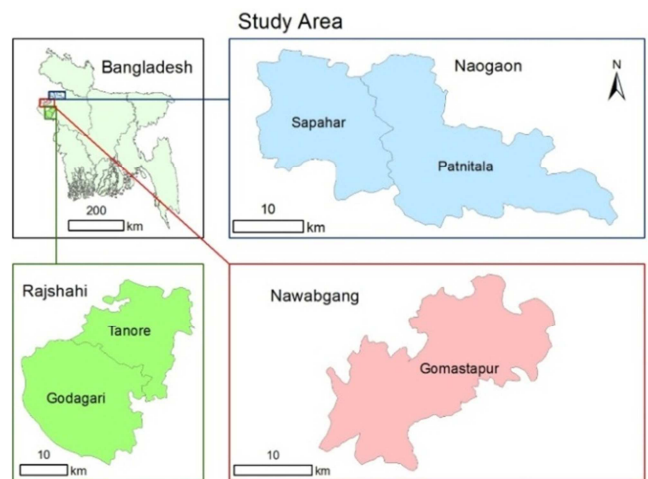


Figure 1. Map of the Sample Sites.

### 3.1. Family Size

The bellow table 1 shows that the average family size among tribal is 4.21 that is more or less is same than the national figure.

Table 1. Family Size among the Tribal People of the Study Area.

Variables	Household Size
Bangladesh	4.48
Study Area	4.35
Tribal	4.21

The above Table 1 shows that the household size is 4.48 in nationally. In the study area, it was observed that the average family size 4.35 including tribal people. But, among the tribal family, their family size is 4.21 that are less than the national even the study area.

### 3.2. Working and Dependent Member in Tribal Family

Through the above figure 2 found that family size per household was 4.21 and average working member and dependency in the tribal family was 2.2 and 2.01

respectively. This indicates that the higher family size higher were the working members.

### 3.3. Dependency Ratio in Tribal Community

Table 2. Dependency Ratio among Tribal Community.

Age group ratio	HIES- 2010			Tribal
	National	Rural	Urban	
0-14	38	40.7	35.3	27.49
15-64	58.15	55.1	61.2	69.04
65+	3.85	4.2	3.5	3.47

In the above Table 2 shows that the highest percentage (69.04%) of tribal household members' belonged to 15-64 age group followed bellow 0-14 years' age group (27.49%), and 65+ age groups (3.47%). It was found that age group and the number of family members were inversely related, in that higher the age group, lower was the number of family members. The dependency ratio in urban area was much faster than the rural area. Among tribal dependency ration is less the national level.

### 3.4. Occupational and Livelihood

In the study area basically there are three major ethnic groups. These are Santal, Oraon, Pahan, Munda, Barman, Rabidas and Mahali are living with their culture, customs, tradition and social values. Moreover, some tribes like Mahali, Rabidas has their traditional occupation.

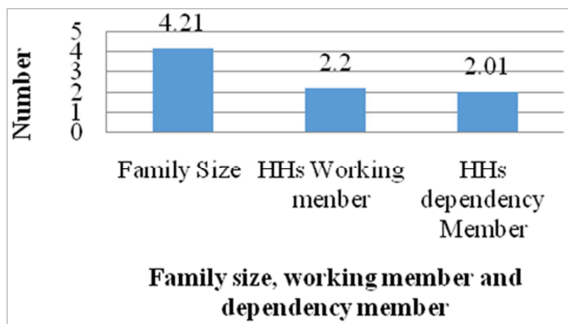


Figure 2. Status of HH Working Member and Dependence Member in Tribal Area.

In the study area there are diversified occupation among the tribal households were found. The main occupation of the respondents is agriculture, service, wage labor, business and driving.

Table 3. Occupational Status of the Tribal People.

Types of Occupation	HHs no	% engaged
Agriculture (Produce from own agriculture land)	85	22.14
Agricultural day labor	234	60.94
Service	23	5.99
Livestock rearing	9	2.34
Fishing	5	1.30
Small business	11	2.86
Traditional profession	17	4.43

The above Table 3 is shown the engagement of sample households in various activities. It is found that 60.94% households are involved in agricultural day labor activities. It is mentionable that in the study area most of the agriculture land are single cropped due to depending on rainy. Around 22.14% household depend on their own cultivable land for production, 5.99% in various formal and no-formal service sectors (Offices support staff, Security guard and Garment factory), 2.34% of total sample HHs are involved in livestock rearing. At same time they also earn partially from daily agriculture sector, and 2.86% tribal households was found involved with small business activities (Petty shop, tea stole). Among the Mahali and Robidas tribal community have their own tradition occupation *e.g.* shoe making and repairing, bamboo material *etc.* Others those who are engaged in nonagricultural activities are working in construction site, daily wage labor *etc.* The figure mention bellow reflects that now nobody in the study villages fully depending on natural resources for their livelihoods.

The main occupation of tribal households is agricultural daily labor (64%), agricultural (12.5%). Some tribal are involved in small business (8.5%), service/professional (7.8%), fishing (4.8%) and tenant farmer (2.5%) [8].

The entire Santal community is mainly dependent on agriculture labor [9]. Only a small portion cultivate their own land others are involved in a non-farm activity such as, non-agricultural labor, small trade, service *etc.* He mentioned that the average daily wage of Santal agricultural laborer is Tk. 50.00 and 35.00 in peak season and lean seasons respectively. He also said that economic condition of the Santals is worsening day by day and they are now among the poorest groups of all indigenous communities.

### 3.5. Household Monthly Income

In the study area, most of tribal people are depend for income on agriculture. Traditionally these tribal groups are very close to soil and agriculture. As mentioned in the table 6 shows that, 60.94% tribal people are involved in agriculture daily labor. Therefore, major portion of income of tribal comes from agricultural laborers that are seasonal and depend on rain.

Table 4. Household Monthly Income Status of Tribal People in the Study Area.

Monthly Income of Household	No of respondent household	% of Respondent
Up to 2000	130	33.85
2001-4000	193	50.26
4000-6000	49	12.76
Above 6000	12	3.13

Through the above table 4 regarding average monthly income of the households, majority (50.26%) of the tribal household's income is up to 4,000.00 BDT per month. Only 3.13% reported that their income is more than 6,000.00 BDT.

The entire Santal community is mainly dependent on agriculture labor their average monthly income from

agricultural day labor is Tk. 1,500.00 (daily 50.00 tk.) in the peak season of agriculture and TK 1,050.00 (daily 35.00 tk.) in lean season when the agricultural work was not available [9].

Another research shows that the average annual income of tribal households was around US\$ 350 (28,000.00 tk.) in

2007 [10]; this number grew significantly reaching over US\$ 570 (45600.00) in 2009. The estimated was average incomes of US\$ 1702 for a rural household in Bangladesh in 2010 [7].

### 3.6. Community Wise Income Source of Tribal Community

Table 5. Comparison of Source of Income and Livelihoods Among Various Tribes.

Community	Total HHs	Agriculture	Agriculture day labor	Service	Livestock	Fishing	Small business	Traditional job
Santal	110	23.33	63.33	4.3	0.66	1.33	1.33	5.33
Oraon	120	28.49	53.36	7.77	2.59	0.51	1.55	5.69
Mahali	46	12.00	32	6	6	0	4	40
Pahan	88	22.98	54.02	3.44	5.74	9.19	4.59	0
Barman	20	15.00	70	5	5	0	5	0

The Table 5 shows that the engagement of sample households in various activities. Among the Santal tribal community it is observed that 63.33% households are involved in agricultural day labor activities. On the other hand, it is 53.36% Oraon tribal people are engaged with agriculture daily labor. It is remarkable that among the Mahali tribal, 40% people are involved in their traditional occupation of bamboo making cottage industry.

The majority Santal community in Bangladesh is mainly dependent on agriculture labor [9, 11].

The main profession of the Mahali is basket-making by bamboos which are sold mainly for agriculture product carrying and betel-leave packaging [12].

### 3.7. Land Holding of Tribal People

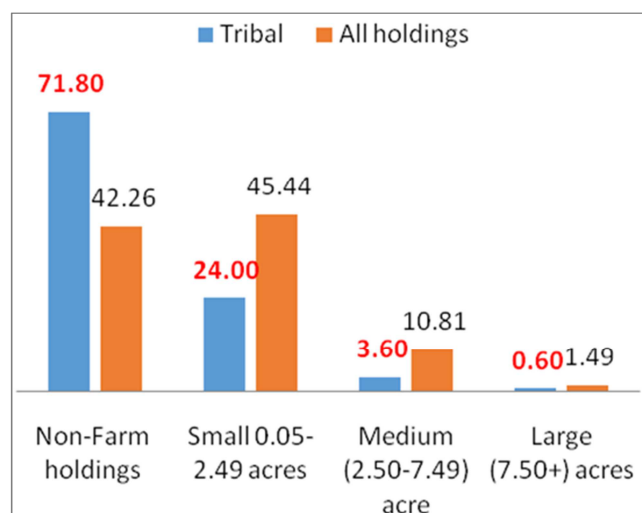


Figure 3. Farm and Non-Farm Land Holdings Size of Tribal People in the Study Area.

The above figure 3 shows that a total 71.80% HHs among tribal have no agricultural land that are treated as absolutely landless in Bangladesh that higher than total household in the study area. Other hand, 24.00% of the tribal households have small farm holders, 3.60% are medium farm holding, and 0.60% are large farm holding respectively.

The trend of landlessness is increasing. A study shows that in 1970 the landlessness percentage was 19.8% that have

reached 68.8% in 2001 [13].

### 3.8. Comparison of Farm Land Between Tribal and Non-Tribal People

Table 6. Agriculture Farming Land Holding Size Among Tribal People in the Study Area.

Size classification holdings	As Agricultural Sample Survey of Bangladesh, 2014 and BBS				Among Surveyed Tribal HHs
	1960	1983-84	1996	2005	
Landless	N/A	8.67	10.18	14.03	48
0.05-0.49 acres	24.3	24.06	28.45	38.63	25.6
0.50-2.49 acres	27.3	46.28	51.42	49.86	18.4
2.50-7.49 acres	37.68	24.72	17.61	10.34	7.8
7.50 acres –above	10.69	4.94	2.52	1.17	0.2

According to the above Table 6 agriculture land ownership has a significant impact on the food security of rural household. In the study area 48.40% of the tribal households are agricultural landless. But in Bangladesh only 14.03% household have no agricultural land. It reveals that triple half of the tribal people are fully depend on agricultural daily or the profession. On the other hand, 48% tribal households are cultivable landless (less than 5 decimal), 25.60% are marginal farmers (5-49 decimal), 18.40% are small farmer (50-149 decimal) and 8.00% are medium farmer. The prevalence of food insecurity tended to be higher among landless or marginalize households who are more depends on riskier sources of income (e.g. Agricultural daily wage employment) than farm income. They are living on *khas* land (Government's land), 33.60% living on own land and 8% tribal households are living on neighbor's land.

### 3.9. Status of Livestock, Poultry and Domestic Animal in the Study Area

The domestic animals (Cow, buffalo, pig, goat, and sheep) and poultry birds (duck, fowl, etc.) play an important role in the socio-economic life of tribal people. The outcome from the animal and poultry birds helps them with supplementary income so as to balance their economic burden. In the previous, most of the tribal was depend on bullocks and buffalos for ploughing land as most of other farmers in



Bangladesh.

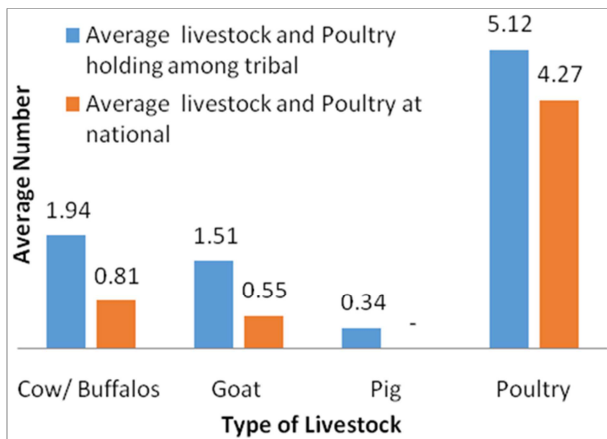


Figure 4. Livestock and Poultry Holdings by Tribal People.

The above figure 4 shows that the average 1.94 number of cow, 1.51 number of goat, 0.34 number of pig and 5.12 number of poultry was found in the tribal family that is higher than national level. The main causes of the tribal people live in the rural areas.

The average number of chicken and duck per family were 6.75 and 6.0 for landless, 5.75 and 2.0 for marginal, 9.15 and 2.84 for small, 9.38 and 2.19 medium, and 11.95 and 2.55 for large group respectively [14].

### 3.10. Status of Health and Sanitation of the Tribal People in the Study Area

Uses of sanitary latrine, drinking of tube well water, use of electricity, buying ability, adoption of contraceptive measures, opportunity for medical facilities, schooling of children, and participation in cooperative society are indicator of living stander of a person or community. Higher user of these facilities indicate living standard of a person or family.

Table 7. Health and Sanitation Situation among Tribal People.

Livelihood standard indicator		% respondent
Using latrine	Pacca Latrine	5.80
	Pit Latrine	7.50
	Water seal Latrine	18.20
Source of Drinking Water	Khacha/ Latrine without Seal	30.50
	Open Defecation	38.00
	Tube well	39.40
Water	Deep tube well	19.00
	Pond	8.40
	Ring Wall	33.20

Table 7 shows that 5.80% of the tribal household uses pacca latrine, 7.50% uses pit latrine and 18.20% uses water seal latrine. It is remarkable situation in the study area that most of the tribal people in the study area still 30.50% use unhygienic latrine and 38.00% use open field for excretion.

In Bangladesh between 1994 and 2009 sanitation using have significantly increased, the percentage of households

openly defecating declined at a rate of about 1.8% per year from 30% in 1994 to 6.8% in 2009 in rural areas [15]. On the other hand, access to individual improved sanitation facilities nearly doubled from about 30% in 2006 to 57% in 2009, with both rural and urban areas showing impressive progress.

In 2007, 20% of the poorest households still openly defecated, although more of them (38%) shared a latrine of any type.

Both the research finding it is revel that open defecation still remain 39.40% among the tribal and poor rural people in Bangladesh.

### 3.11. Health Seeking Pattern Among Tribal People

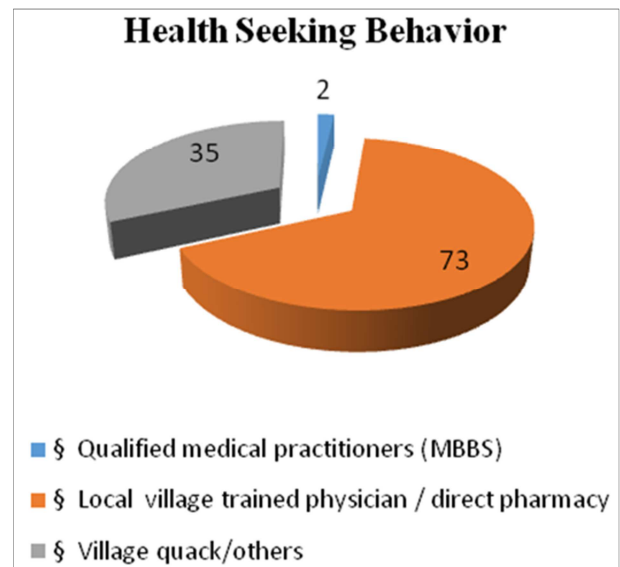


Figure 5. Health Seeking Pattern among of Tribal People.

The above figure 5 indicates that during the sickness, only 2% tribal people visited the doctor MBBS doctor, 73% visited local trained physician or pharmacy, and 35% tribal people visited local quake / their traditional Junguru / Kabiraj (Village quack / Yurbadic physician). No kitchen attached to the bedroom at the tribal people home.

The village healer is still very popular among tribal people in Bangladesh that is support my result in this thesis [16]. The both result indicate that the present systems of health care service delivery systems. More attention and priority should be given to the tribal people.

## 4. Conclusion

The tribal people faced several risk factors and constraints in improving their livelihood. These factors were lack of modern technology, lack of education, high price of daily commodities, lack of agricultural land, reduction of land productivity due to drought and natural calamities like flood, drought, and low rainfall. They identified some other problems in their livelihood. These were: loss of biodiversity, loss of wetland resource and forest resources.

In the absence of adequate assistance, tribal households in

the study area met the stress situation in their own way. Sample households sold their labor advance during various kinds of stresses situation followed by use of previous savings, borrowed money, selling the livestock, poultry. They had little options to face the emergency situation with little savings in their hands.

---

## References

- [1] Human Development Report 1995. 1st ed. New York: Oxford University Press, 1995. [Available at: [http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/256/hdr\\_1995\\_en\\_complete\\_nostats.pdf](http://hdr.undp.org/sites/default/files/reports/256/hdr_1995_en_complete_nostats.pdf)] [Accessed 28 June 2016.]
- [2] Goehring, B., "Indigenous Peoples of the World: An Introduction to Their Past, Present, and Future." Purich's Aboriginal Issues Series. Purich Publishing, Box 23032, Market Mall Post Office, Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, Canada S7J 5H3, 1993.
- [3] Kabir, L., "The rights and liabilities of the raiyats under the Bengal tenancy act, 1885, and the State acquisition and tenancy act, 1950: with amendments." 1972.
- [4] The Bangladesh Gazette extraordinary, "Khudra Nregosthi Sankskritic Prothithan Ain-2010", Published by Bangladesh Government Press, 2010.
- [5] Kamruzzaman, Palash. "Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and the rhetoric of participation." *Development in practice* vol. 19.1, 2009, pp. 61-71.
- [6] STATISTICS, B. B. O., "Population and housing census 1991", 1992.
- [7] STATISTICS, B. B. O., "Population and housing census 2011", 2012.
- [8] Hossain, D. M., "Socio-economic Situation of the Indigenous People in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh. Hossain, DM (2013), Socio-economic Condition of the Indigenous People in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh", *Middle East Journal of Business*, vol. 8 (2), 2013, pp. 22-30.
- [9] Samad, M., "The Santals in Bangladesh: Problems, Needs and Development Potentials". *Journal of Ethnic Affairs*, vol. 2, 2006, pp. 9-13.
- [10] Pant, J., Barman, B. K., Murshed-E-Jahan, K., Belton, B. and Beveridge, M., "Can aquaculture benefit the extreme poor? A case study of landless and socially marginalized Adivasi (ethnic) communities in Bangladesh", *Aquaculture*, vol. 418, 2014, pp. 1-10.
- [11] Ali, A., "Santals of Bangladesh. Institute of Social Research and Applied Anthropology". Publisher: Fulgeria, Dist. Midnapur, W. B.: Institute of Social Research & Applied Anthropology; Calcutta: Distributors, Subarnarekha, 1998.
- [12] Bhowmick, P. K., "Tribal Situation in West Bengal", *Indian Anthropologist*, vol. 15 (1), 1985, pp. 1-19.
- [13] Raihan, S., Fatehin, S. and Haque, I., "Access to land and other natural resources by the rural poor: the case of Bangladesh. 38621", University Library of Munich, Germany, 2009.
- [14] Rahman, S. M. R., "Family poultry production and utilization system in relation to landholding at Semi Arid Area of Bangladesh", *Small*, vol. 1 (2.47), 2003, pp. 48.
- [15] Zheng, Y., Hakim, S. A. I., Nahar, Q., van Aghthoven, A. and Flanagan, S. V., "Sanitation coverage in Bangladesh since the millennium: consistency matters", *Journal of Water Sanitation and Hygiene for Development*, vol. 3 (2), 2013, pp. 240-251.
- [16] Rahman, M. S., Sarker, S. U. and Jaman, M. F., "Ecological Status of the Herpeto-Mammalian Fauna of the Padma River and its Adjacent Areas, Rajshahi and their Conservation Issues", *Bangladesh Journal of Zoology*, vol. 40 (1), 2012, pp. 135-145.