

**Baseline Study on**  
**Sustainable Livelihoods and Inclusive Development of the**  
**Bedey Community in Savar Upazila of Dhaka District**

**Dr Tapash Kumar Biswas**  
**Director (Research), PKSF**  
**and**  
**Kamrunnahar**  
**Manager (Research), PKSF**



**Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF)**  
*[www.pksf-bd.org](http://www.pksf-bd.org)*

**June 2018**

---

PKSF Bhaban, E-4/B, Agargaon Administrative Area, Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh  
Teleph1: +88-02-9126240; Fax: +88-02-9134431, 9126244; E-mail: [pksf@pksf-bd.org](mailto:pksf@pksf-bd.org)

# Executive Summary

## 1. Introduction

There were about 0.80 million Bedeys in Bangladesh in 2014. Most of them are living below the poverty line. Their incomes vary time to time due to seasonal variation in their occupations. They are stereotyped as uneducated, swindler and defiled because of their non-conventional occupations, such as traditional healer, rural hawkers, magicians, snake charmers. They are labeled as backward and inferior in society. Poverty is the root cause of their overall social exclusion and deprivation. Recently, they have become critically vulnerable, because nowadays people do not like traditional occupations of the Bedeys. Thus they need a transformation from their traditional occupations to mainstream occupations like those of people living in the mainland areas. It is to be noted that Social Upliftment Society (SUS) started development activities for the Bedey community in Savar area of Dhaka district in July 2000. It has started stipend programme along with other programmes for the Bedeys in 2014. Keeping these issues in perspective, Learning and Innovation Fund to Test New Ideas (LIFT) Project of PKSF has undertaken a sub-project on ‘Sustainable Livelihoods and Inclusive Development of the Bedey Community in Savar Upazila’ through SUS, one of its Partner Organisations (POs) in 2017. The main objective of this project is to mainstreaming the Bedey community with the mainland people. In order to assess the impact of the project and designing the programme for improving the lives and livelihoods of the Bedey community a baseline study on them seemed very much useful. With this backdrop a baseline study has been undertaken with the general objective to assess the livelihoods of the Bedeys by knowing their problems and prospects towards mainstreaming them with suitable interventions under LIFT project of PKSF.

## 2. Study Methods

The study was conducted in four Bedey villages of Savar Upazila in Dhaka district. The villages were: Kanchanpur, Porabari, Amarpur and Bokterpur. The study was based on complete enumeration of all the 820 permanent households including 263 in Kanchanpur, 226 in Porabari, 241 in Amarpur and 90 in Bakterpur. To know the condition of temporary or floating households, 35 of them were also interviewed through the same questionnaire. Thus the total sample size of the study was 855 households. Moreover, case studies and FGDs were conducted with the key informants including local government, mainland people and leaders of Bedey community. Data were collected through structured questionnaire from both

permanent and temporary households. Key informants' interview and FGD were conducted through check list. In order to ensure the quality of data, 3-day intensive training was imparted to the field enumerators on data collection techniques and filling-up questionnaire. Data were processed through SPSS software. The unit of analysis was household.

### **3. Demographic Characteristics**

Demographic dependency ratios are 70.48 percent in the permanent households and 68.18 percent in the temporary households with an average of 70.33 percent indicating a very high percentage of dependent population, particularly for permanent households. The average size of households is 4.31 -- 4.28 for the permanent households and 5.00 for the temporary households. The overall sex ratio indicates that there are about 101 males for each 100 females. Mean ages at first marriage of male and female are 20.8 and 15.4 years respectively with an average of 17.9 years. About 39 percent of the female members got married within 14 years and about 92 percent within 19 years. In case of male, about 38 percent got married within 19 years and about 84 percent within 24 years. Major reasons for early marriage are: affair marriage, lack of security for girls, prevailing tradition of early marriage in the Bedey community and poverty. Percentage of divorced, separated and widowed together is 5.2 -- 5.2 percent in the permanent households and 4.0 percent in the temporary households. The average ages of becoming mother and father for the first time in the permanent households of Bedey community are 17.5 and 22.9 years respectively with similar figures in temporary households. About 14 percent of the total mothers become mother within 14 years, 77 percent within 19 years, 98 percent within 24 years and the rest between 25 to 34 years. About 84 percent eligible couples in the permanent households, 85 percent in the temporary households and overall 83.6 percent adopted at least one of the family planning methods. The polygamy rate for male is 3.8 percent in the permanent households, 2.4 percent in the temporary households and 3.77 percent overall. Similarly, the polygamy rate for female is 0.5 percent in the permanent households, 2.4 percent in the temporary households and 0.6 percent overall. There are about 52 divorces per 1000 women married to men -- around 53 in the permanent households and 24 in the temporary households.

### **4. Livelihood Status of the Bedey Households**

Current livelihood status of the Bedey households are assessed through five capitals or livelihood assets. These are human capital, social capital, natural capital, physical capital and financial capital.

#### **4.1 Endowment of Human Capital**

Overall general literacy rate of the Bedey household members is about 42 percent -- 53 percent for male and 32 percent for female, while the overall adult literacy rate is about 38 percent -- 50 percent for male and 25 percent for female. Overall about 61 percent of the Bedey household members -- 61 percent in the permanent households and 57 percent in temporary households -- have no formal schooling. Only around two percent of them have SSC and above level of education. This situation is much worse among the female members. About 70 percent of them do not have any formal schooling. Low level of education is one of the major constraints in improving their livelihood status. Lack of parental awareness, less interest of younger people to study instead of earning, early marriage, nomadic business of parents, etc. are the major causes of lack of formal schooling and low level of education. Overall only around 12 percent of the households obtained any type of training during the last five years. Permanent households obtained about 20 types of training, while temporary households obtained only two types of training which are tailoring and fish culture. The major areas of training obtained by the permanent households are tailoring, driving, poultry rearing, mushroom cultivation, fish culture, electronic instrument repairing, mobile servicing, beef fattening, carpentry, shoe making, computer operating, etc. Out of 106 training recipient households, 36 percent utilized their training knowledge in productive activities. The major reasons for not utilizing the training are: lack of capital, training forgotten, inadequate training knowledge, lack of time due to the involvement in family business and household activities, getting permanent job, lack of relevant training with income generating activities, lack of supervision for training utilisation and like others. It is to be noted that none of the temporary households utilized their training mainly due to their nomadic life. Overall about 80 percent of the Bedey households -- 80 percent in the permanent households and 77 percent in the temporary households -- needed training for their household members. The important areas of required training are: tailoring, driving, poultry rearing, mechanics, mobile servicing, cattle rearing, beef fattening, computer operating, Nakshi Kantha, vehicle repairing, electric wearing, Karchupi works, bamboo and cane works, fish culture, shoe making, plumbing, carpentry, beauty parlor and like others. Average duration of the training courses suggested by the respondents is about two months ranging from three weeks to four months.

## **4.2 Endowment of Social Capital**

About 78 percent of the Bedey households -- 78 percent in the permanent households and 66 percent in the temporary households-- have good relationship with the local people. Only 10 percent of the total Bedey households received any types of facility from the local municipality office. They visited local municipality office for receiving holding number, relief, birth registration certificate, pregnancy allowance, citizen certificate, elderly/widow allowance, VGD, VGF, national ID, and paying land and holding tax. Out of these 11 items, all the households who expressed demand for the specific facilities received the facilities on six items. In the rest of the cases, some of the households did not receive the facilities they have demanded for. About 98 percent of the total households opined that they are able to eat at local restaurants together with other community people. Eighty seven percent of the household members aged at least 18 years are voters and 83 percent of the voters voted in the last municipality election. About 88 percent of the Bedey households mentioned that they are able to pray at local mosques with other Muslim people. The Bedey households visited all the 64 districts of Bangladesh for their business purpose during the last year. Twenty percent of the total households visited India during the last year for their business purpose. Purpose of visiting India is because snake charming is not very popular in the locality and they cannot cheat with the local people. Moreover, they can earn more money from Indian people. Indian people give more value to the Bedey community.

## **4.3 Endowment of Physical Capital**

About one-fifth of the total Bedey households have pucca main dwelling house with insignificant difference between the permanent and temporary households. Overall about 71 percent of the Bedey households have own dwelling house. The same is 71 percent for permanent households and 63 percent for temporary households. About 50 percent of the permanent households and 40 percent of the temporary households with an average of 50 percent households have hygienic toilet. The temporary households used to stay, most of the time, outside their home. As such they give less priority on hygienic condition of their toilets at home. Almost 100 percent of the total households have access to safe drinking water. About 96 percent of the total households have electricity connection -- 96 percent in the permanent households and 89 percent in the temporary households. Nearly 94 percent of the total households use cow dung/wood/bran/charcoal as fuel for cooking which is not good for health.

It creates heavy smoke which has negative effect on health. Only about five percent households use gas.

#### **4.4 Endowment of Natural Capital**

Overall about 66 percent of the Bedey households have any types of own land -- about 66 percent in the permanent households and about 63 percent in the temporary households, which indicates overall 34 percent of the Bedey households are absolutely landless. Average size of own land of the Bedey households is 1.89 decimals – 1.89 decimals in the permanent households and 1.73 decimals in the temporary households. Alternatively, about 35 percent of the total Bedey households do not have any own land. Except homestead, temporary households do not have any other types of land. On an average there are only 0.21 trees per household considering all the households. Through 65 percent of the Bedey households have homestead, but only six percent of them have trees. Therefore, there might be some opportunity for tree plantation at the homestead of the Bedey households.

#### **4.5 Endowment of Financial Capital**

The major occupations of the Bedey household members are snake charming, hawking, healer/kabiraj, umbrella/lock smith and others. There is a declining trend of traditional occupation of the Bedey household members. Previously about 88 percent of the Bedey household members were engaged in traditional occupation as their main occupation, now it has come down to 52 percent. However, currently a significant portion of female members are engaged in household activities as housewives. Main reasons for declining the engagement of the Bedey people in their traditional occupations are: general people do not trust on their treatment, modern medical facilities are available, now snake charming has become less attractive to the common people, and alternative recreation facilities are available. The Bedey people themselves also realize that their traditional occupation is not fair in nature. About 75 percent of the Bedey households do not like to continue the traditional occupation. Due to their nature of occupation they do not get respect from the common people. Even 44 percent of the Bedey households do not like to continue their traditional culture.

Overall full-time employment, part-time employment and unemployment rates of the economically active population of the Bedey households are 24.2, 66.2 and 9.6 percent respectively. Absolute unemployment rate for female is more than double than that of the male.

Full-time employment rate of female is also significantly lower than that of the male. Overall per capita annual income of the Bedey household members is Tk. 29,408 -- Tk. 29,397 for permanent households and Tk. 29,408 for temporary households. The value of Gini coefficient at national level is 0.483 in 2016 compared to 0.25 in 2017 for the Bedey community, which indicates the income distribution of the Bedey community is very much homogeneous compared to the national average. Overall per capita annual income of the Bedey households is about 12 percent higher than that of their average expenditure. Thus the Bedeys have a little scope for savings. Overall about 93 percent of the households have some amount of savings -- 93 percent in the permanent households and 91 percent in the temporary households. Per household savings, considering all the households, are Tk. 7,826 for the permanent households and Tk. 9,920 for the temporary households with an average of Tk.7912. Overall percentages of the Bedey population living below the lower and the upper poverty lines are 48 and 68 percentage respectively measured by CBN method, while the incidence of multidimensional poverty is about 77 percent for both the permanent and temporary households. These are significantly higher than that of the national average.

Of the total number of households overall about 53 percent received credit -- 53 in the permanent households and 54 in the temporary households. Overall of the total credit recipient members 63 percent are male and 37 percent are female. It has been found that overall on average, a borrower received credit of Tk. 53,315 -- Tk. 53,573 by the permanent households and Tk. 47,575 by the temporary households in the last installment. The households have received credit from relatives/friends, POs of PKSF, other NGOs, moneylenders, banks, cooperative societies and goldsmiths. Overall per household current outstanding loan is Tk. 39,688 -- Tk. 40,038 for the permanent households and Tk. 31925 for the temporary households. About 26 percent of the total households under the study needed credit. Average amount of credit requirement of the Bedey households is Tk. 77, 396 including Tk. 75,878 for the permanent households and Tk. 1,13,333 for the temporary households. Major purposes of credit requirement are grocery business, cloth business, purchasing auto, purchasing sewing machine, house construction, poultry rearing, purchasing land for housing, raw materials business, loan repayment, cattle rearing, vegetable business, fish business, snake charming, tea stall business, restaurant business and others.

#### **4.6 Shocks and their Coping Strategies**

Overall about eight percent of the total households faced shocks during the last year prior to the survey. Major areas of shocks faced by the Bedey households are: sickness, unexpected expenditure for getting treatment, death of earning member, destruction of house due to flood, providing compensation for divorce and loss of boat. Strategies recommended for coping with the shocks are: savings, introducing low cost treatment, awareness creation, employment opportunity creation and more cooperation among the Bedey households.

#### **5. Problems and Potentials of the Bedey Households in Relation to their Livelihood Improvement**

About 98 percent of the Bedey households faced problems with their livelihoods. The major problems faced by them are: (i) people do not like snake charming and Kabiraji treatment, (ii) maximum time of the year they need to stay outside of the home for their occupations, (iii) lack of sewerage facilities, (iv) lack of acceptance of the Bedey in the society, (v) dirty environment around their residence, (vi) bad road condition in the local area, (vii) lack of access to government facilities, (viii) lack of local clinic, (ix) lack of capital for initiating new business, (x) low income through traditional business of the Bedeys due to increased awareness of people, (xi) lack of access to social safety net programme, (xii) lack of hygienic toilet in the household, (xiii) negligence of teachers in admitting Bedey's children at school, (xiv) lack of knowledge for initiating new business, (xv) difficult to keep small children at home during *Gaul*(mobile business), (xvi) lack of education due to poverty, (xvii) male members are reluctant to engage in income generating activity, (xviii) early marriage of girls and (xix) lack of safe water.

Opinions of the Bedey households regarding the available potentials of them are: (i) capability of receiving training, (ii) availability of physical labour, (iii) capability of doing mainstream business, (iv) availability of capable people for sewing, (v) capability for getting a job, (vi) capability for poultry/cattle rearing, (vii) availability of people with training on fish culture, (viii) availability of people with driving skill.

Opinions of the respondents regarding the solutions of the problems are: (i) increasing opportunities for alternative income generating activities, (ii) increasing awareness of the Bedeys, (iii) establishing linkage with government service providers, (iv) establishing



sewerage system, (v) constructing road, (vi) imparting skill development training, (vii) establishing clinic, (viii) ensuring voting right of the Bedeys, (ix) providing higher education, (x) toilet installation, (xi) establishing government school, (xii) increasing awareness on health, nutrition and sanitation and (xiii) others like ensuring social security, providing space for business, issuing ID card, etc.

About 73 percent of the Bedey household heads want to change their traditional occupation. The major reasons behind this view are: (i) snake charming is no more popular now, (ii) they do not like bohemian life, (iii) they do not have social respect on this occupation, (iv) less income, (v) want to settle in own district, (vi) more laborious business, (vii) performance of monkey on the street is getting less popular and (viii) they need to tell lie for the sake of this profession. Overall nearly 16 percent of the Bedey permanent households adopted mainstream occupation quitting their traditional occupations in the study areas, but none of the temporary households adopted mainstream occupation. One of the reasons is that they do not have adequate skill to adapt with the mainstream occupation. Most of the Bedey households adopted mainstream occupation from their own initiatives, observing the livelihoods of mainland people, friends and parents initiative. For mainstreaming the livelihoods of the Bedeys they need capital for initiating business, elimination of discrimination between the Bedeys and the mainland people, providing driving training, shop and rickshaw. All the permanent households and about 83 percent of the temporary households are interested to settle in the mainland. The major reasons are: currently the Bedey people do not like their nomadic life, traditional occupation of the Bedeys is no more popular now a days and day by day income from this occupation is decreasing.

Very small number of Bedey women faced violence as they are much more empowered than those of the mainland women because of their nature of occupation, but incidence of violence against women is about five times higher in the temporary households than that of the permanent households. The major areas of violence against women are oppression by husband, demanding dowry and getting divorce. About four percent of the total households are drug addicted, which are mostly spread through the friends.

## **6. Opinions Regarding the Strategies for Linking the Bedeys with the Service Providers and Employers**

The current major service providers to the Bedeys are: Uttaron Foundation, Municipality, POs of PKSF, Uttaron Garments, EPI, CDC, other NGOs and Social Welfare Department. The proposed major potential service providers are: NGOs, GOs, Municipality, POs of PKSF, health clinic, Government Primary School, Uttaron Garments Factory, Councilor, Election Commission, Social Welfare Department and Uttaron Foundation.

Major problems of linking the Bedeys with the service providers are: lack of knowledge about the service providers, misappropriation of the community leaders, lack of adequate service against the demand, needs bribe to receive service, lack of due attention to the Bedey households by the service providers, lack of doctors at health clinic, needing membership with local NGOs to get service, lack of access to stipend programme of school going children, inadequate access to free of cost books, early marriage of girls and lack of literacy.

Major probable strategies for linking the Bedeys with the service providers are: notification to the ward counselor for the required services, notification to the concerned department of the government, establishment of permanent health clinic for treatment, community leaders should take more responsibility for the development of the Bedeys, contacting with the Social Welfare Department, establishment of industries for employment generation, contacting with the training institutes, imparting need-based training with grant for initiating IGAs, campaign for awareness development on health, sanitation and social issues, distribution of health card to the poor Bedey households, establishment of government primary school for the Bedey community, enrollment of the Bedey households with the local NGOs, introducing quota system for the Bedeys in the areas of stipend programme, employment and different allowances, ensuring adequate marks and school attendance to get a stipend and promoting higher education.

## **7. Opinions Regarding the Required Interventions and Support Services for Mainstreaming the Livelihoods of the Bedeys**

The important interventions implemented for mainstreaming the livelihoods of the Bedeys are: establishment of garments factory, credit disbursement, imparting training and establishment of shoe factory; while the major implemented interventions related to standard of life are road

construction, establishment of Eid-gah, installation of toilets, implementation of EPI, construction of Masjid, construction of school, distribution of free of cost books, installation of hand tube wells, improvement of drainage system, providing healthcare facilities and stipend by NGOs.

Major recommended IGAs for males are: driving, electrical works, mobile repairing, cattle rearing, computer operating, motor mechanics, fish cultivation, working in different workshops and tailoring. While the major recommended IGAs for females are: tailoring, poultry rearing, Karchupi works, cattle rearing, Nakshi Kantha stitching, bamboo and cane works, beauty parlour, Batik works and mushroom cultivation.

Major training areas have been identified for the males are: driving, electrical/electronics, mobile repairing, motor mechanics, cattle rearing, computer application, fish culture, tailoring, snake farming, poultry rearing, bamboo and cane works, lock smith, cycle repairing, television/refrigerator repairing, shoe making and village doctor; while the same for the females are tailoring, poultry rearing, Karchupi work, cattle rearing, Nakshi Kantha stitching, bamboo and cane works, beauty parlour, batik and mushroom cultivation.

In order to mainstreaming the livelihoods of the Bedeys their suggested strategies are: skill development through training, gas supply, establishment of a government primary school within the Bedey community, road construction, establishment of garments industry, motivation for education, development of sewerage system, credit support with low interest rate, establishment of healthcare center, creation of new employment opportunities, awareness raising, sewing programme for women, establishment of toilet facilities, initiating more programme by PKSf, financial support for house building/ repairing and land allocation for settlement.

## **8. Major Recommendations**

For mainstreaming the livelihoods of the Bedeys the study recommends:

- (i) Developing basic infrastructural facilities.
- (ii) Providing basic education to all the school going aged children and then technical education to the interested ones.
- (iii) Providing higher level of education along with employment for reducing early marriage.

- (iv) Suitable IGAs for mainstreaming the livelihoods of the Bedey households may be tailoring, driving, poultry rearing, electrical works, cattle rearing, mobile repairing, *Karchupi* works, computer operating, fish culture, motor mechanic, beauty parlour, grocery business, TV/refrigerator repairing, cycle mechanic, village doctor, etc.
- (v) Providing demand-led skill development training with appropriate credit in the areas of tailoring, driving, poultry rearing, mechanics, electronics, mobile servicing, cattle rearing, computer operating, Nakshi Kantha, electric wearing, Block-batik, shoe making, plumbing, carpentry, beauty parlour, etc.
- (vi) Providing membership of the NGOs for receiving required services like credit, training, healthcare facilities, etc.
- (vii) Depositing weekly savings to the NGOs as a coping strategy with the shocks.
- (viii) Providing stipend to the Bedey students like the Dalit students under social safety net programme.
- (ix) Major strategies for mainstreaming the livelihoods of the Bedeys should be imparting skill-based training, establishing government primary school, constructing roads, establishing garments industry, motivating children along with their parents for education, development of sewerage system in the residential area, appropriate credit support with low interest for IGAs and house building, land allocation for settlement, establishment of healthcare center, creation of employment opportunities.
- (x) The Bedey households, those who still want to continue their traditional occupations, can continue umbrella and lock repairing, small business on utensils and snake farming instead of snake charming.

## **9. Action Plan**

An action plan has been developed based on the research findings of this study. The overall goal of the plan is to sustainably reduce the incidence of multidimensional poverty among the Bedey households. The outcome of the plan is mainstreaming the livelihoods of the Bedeys, which will be achieved through four outputs -- increased sustainable employment opportunity, developed physical infrastructure, enhanced access to health and sanitation services, and reduced vulnerability. Each of these outputs will be achieved through the implementation of a set of activities or interventions.