

Caritas helps tribal languages survive

Training scheme ensures ethnic people read and write mother tongue

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A special mother tongue training initiative by the Church's social service agency, Caritas Bangladesh, is helping prevent tribal languages in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) from becoming extinct.

Since 2008, the organization has trained 480 teachers from village based education centers (VBEC) to teach tribal languages to children who do not get to learn their mother tongue in formal education.

Language experts from the Tripura, Marma and Chakma tribes have helped teachers improve their reading, writing and speaking skills.

In the last four years about 8,000 students have benefited from the initiative.

"We hope these 8,000 will teach the languages to 8,000 more. Our dream is to see every tribal child know their mother tongue," said Kanantar Chakma, 38, Caritas' VBEC supervisor.

Participants at a recent training session in Bandarban district said the initiative could be implemented in other tribal areas in Bangladesh.

Mong Hla Ching Marma, 23, a Marma teacher said he always wanted to read and write in his native language but the education system didn't give him the chance.

"I couldn't write or read a single word. It's the same for many people because of years of negligence from our leaders and the authorities," he said.

Thanks to Caritas, not only have I learned the language, I can now teach it to hundreds of students, he said.

"It's very important to document things and teach our native tongue to the next generation, because the language gives our people our identity," said Andrew Tripura, 28, a Tripura teacher.

There are about half a million tribal people in the CHT belonging to around 11 ethnic groups.

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<http://www.ucanews.com>.***