

My Language and Culture: My Identity

SIL Bangladesh helps communities achieve their development goals while retaining their Ethno linguistic identities.

"I'm speechless and can't believe that this kind of event could happen in our community", said Mr. Lacham Kol, a 60-year old leader from the Kol community. He was so excited and his smile communicated more than his words. Young girls and middle-aged women, wearing red and yellow sarees for this special occasion, were waiting for the cultural competition. Children were also wandering around in colourful outfits, enjoying themselves. Lots of community members were seated in front of the stage to watch the cultural activities. They had spent a lot of time preparing for the program, practising traditional songs and dances.

This was a day celebrating the Kol community in the village of Babudaing, in north west Bangladesh. The UN has declared 2019 the "International Year of Indigenous Languages". To help celebrate indigenous communities, SIL International Bangladesh is organising several events, including the cultural program in the Kol community which took place on September 11th, 2019. The theme was "My Language and Culture: My Identity". Around 600 community members took part in the program enthusiastically. Md. Shimul Akter (the local government official) was the chief guest and Mr. Cornelius Tudu, the Country Director of SIL International Bangladesh, presided at the program.

The inaugural ceremony started at 11:00am. A group welcomed the guests and community members with a traditional dance. There was then a competition featuring eight groups from different villages, performing traditional songs and dances. Later there was a discussion on the theme of child rights, where Cornelius Tudu, was the main speaker. He emphasised the future dreams of children and parents and talked about how parents need to understand the needs of their children and support them. Children also need to respect and listen to their parents. Five Kol families were awarded a 'Model Family' crest by the Child Rights for Ethnic Minorities project, in recognition of their efforts to provide nutritious food for their families, meet their children's needs and uphold their rights.

After lunch break community members danced spontaneously. People were so excited that they didn't want to stop dancing, even when it started raining. One 65-year-old woman, Samry Turua Hasda, told us that she had come from the village of Chickna, 20 kilometres away. She said "We don't have enough opportunities to enjoy ourselves, except at weddings. After a long time, we're got the chance to have fun. I'm very happy and excited and want to dance all day."

At 5.30 there were a discussion time and a prize giving ceremony for the traditional dance competition. The chief guest, Md. Shimul Akter was present. During the discussion time the guests admired the traditional songs and dances. One of the



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... SNAPSHOTS ...
WHAT'S PLANNED FOR THIS
MONTH

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Oct 05, 2019: Mahle Youth Seminar .

Oct 14, 2019: Project Advisory committee Meeting at Dhaka.

Oct 15-16, 2019: M & E and Staff meeting/ Training at Dhaka.

Oct 21-22, 2019: Awareness raising seminar on ensuring health Services and Security Services with Kol Community.

Oct 22-23, 2019: Bolte Chai, importance of Language & culture with KOL Community.

Oct 24-25, 2019: Awareness raising seminar on ensuring health Services and Security Services with Koch Community

My language and Culture: My Identity Cont'd

guests said that this was the first time that a high-level government official had visited the village of Babudaing in 48 years since Independence of Bangladesh. People were really grateful to Md. Shimul Akter for attending the event. They talked about their family life, their health and education and raised the issue of permanent accommodation with the government officials. The Kol community still live on "khas land" (owned by the Government) and need the opportunity to have their own land.

The official assured people that he will try to solve the problems. He encouraged community members to come and see him at the local government office for support. He also approved three solar street lights for the church, the Hindu temple and the school on the spot. He reassured people that there would be electricity and an opportunity to settle on the land where they are living.

SIL tries to raise awareness amongst communities of the need to speak up for their rights and to make connections with government officials. The Kol community recognise that the time is right to raise their concerns. We are really glad that people can communicate and stand up for their own rights. In 2015 the Kol community were still quite marginalised from mainstream society but now they are making requests to the local government. It is encouraging to see their efforts for community development and we are glad to support the community in achieving their goals.

Written by: Jewel Rozario

