

From Boats to Land: Transition of Diets and Cultural Identity of the Resettled Bede Community of Sunamganj, Bangladesh

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BACKGROUND

- The Bede are a historically river-dwelling community dependent on fishing, healing, and snake charming.
- A recent resettlement moved them from boats to permanent land in Sunamganj.
- This shift reduced access to river resources, altered their traditional occupations, and changed their food habits.
- These changes are now influencing both their nutrition and the cultural identity that once defined Bede life.

METHODS

- Qualitative approach and Purposive Sampling conducted in a resettled Bede community in northeastern Bangladesh
- 9 in-depth interviews with adults (4 men, 5 women; 18-50 years), capturing everyday dietary and cultural changes
- 3 life-history interviews with elders (51-70 years) to trace intergenerational transitions
- 1 mixed-gender FGD to document collective perceptions of food practices and identity shifts

RESULTS

- Shift from river to land reduced access to fresh fish, river crabs, and medicinal herbs.
- Diets became more carbohydrate-heavy, lowering protein and vitamin intake.
- Reliance on purchased and processed foods increased food insecurity risks.
- Traditional occupations (fishing, herbal medicine, snake charming) declined.
- Loss of food-related practices weakened cultural knowledge and rituals.
- Dietary changes contributed directly to erosion of Bede cultural identity.



CONCLUSION

- Resettlement reduced Bede nutrition and weakened cultural identity
- BCC Model and community stories can revive traditional food practices.
- Scaling need joint action from government, Bede leaders and NGOs
- Policies should support heritage-based food ventures and safeguard knowledge.
- Digital platform can preserve stories and expand market for Bede foods.

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