

**Program:** Mohammed Bazar Backward Classes Development Society (MBBCDS), West Bengal, in partnership with the Association for India's Development, Inc. (AID)

**Project Website:** <http://aidindia.org/main/content/view/1139/278/>

**Mission:** Association for India's Development (AID) is a 501(c)3 organization promoting sustainable, equitable and just development. AID supports grassroots organizations and initiates efforts in various interconnected spheres such as agriculture, energy, education, health, livelihoods, natural resources, women's empowerment and social justice.



**Where They Work:** DFW's donation will support tribal women in India through AID Philadelphia chapter's partnership with the **Mohammed Bazar Backward Classes Development Society** (MBBCDS), a nonpolitical, secular, NGO in the Birbhum district of West Bengal. Though the 7<sup>th</sup> most populist sub-national entity in the world and the 3<sup>rd</sup> largest contributor to India's GDP, West Bengal is one of the poorest states in India. MBBCDS works in tribal villages declared "economically backward" -- a term for groups who make less economic progress than other Indians. In the 2001 census, Mohammad Bazar community's scheduled tribe (ST) population was 28,994.

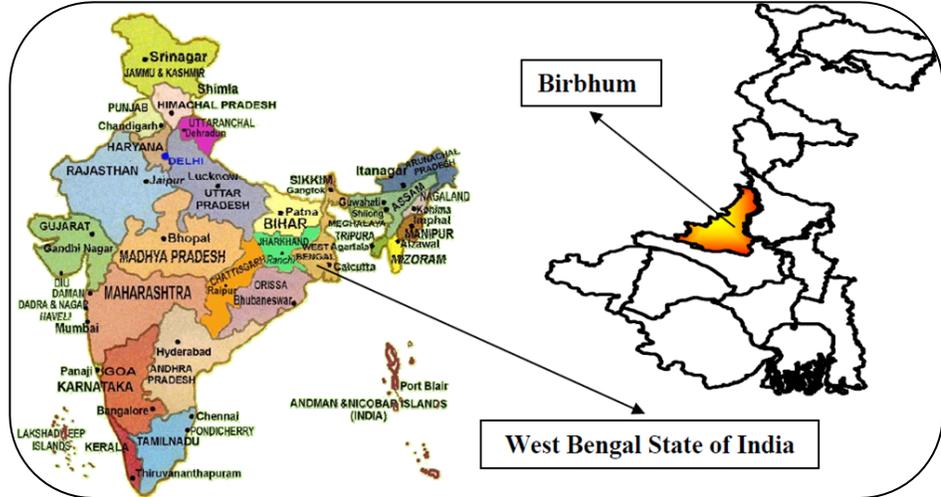
"ST" is a population grouping explicitly recognized by the India's Constitution. **STs, also called Adivasis, are believed to be the aboriginal people of India.** They fall outside India's hierarchical caste system, and India's constitution lacks criterion for specifying ST communities. However, tribal communities are often identified by their geographical isolation – living in cloistered, remote, inhospitable areas – basing livelihood on primitive agriculture and a low-value closed economy with low technology, low literacy rates, and health levels that yield tribal poverty.

In Villages of the Mohammed Bazar Block

- Female literacy is 5%.
- About 65% of girls drop out the mainstream educational system.
- Due to a lack of proper health care facilities, untrained midwives deliver 80% of infants.
- About 65% are born with malnutrition and other complications.
- Child mortality is as high as 25%.

### History of the Area:

Though both castes and tribes face oppression, tribal groups maintained little contact with other cultures and people throughout history. In doing so, they avoided assimilation into India's hierarchical caste system and remained



autonomous until the Mughal invasion in the 16<sup>th</sup> century.

Exclusivity allowed various tribes to preserve their distinctive cultures, languages and religions, but it kept tribal people, especially women and children, from the benefits of economic and humanitarian development.

Under 19<sup>th</sup> century British imperialism, Indian castes and tribes were called “depressed classes.” In 1935, Britain passed an act that gave India more self-rule. It also established the terms scheduled caste (SC) and ST, reserving government representation for both groups. After India gained independence from Britain in 1947, a new constitution, which led to further reform in the 80s and 90s, improved the situation of SCs and STs. Still, few STs benefit from governmental reforms, and in a 2009 conference, the Indian Prime Minister highlighted India's continual exploitation and economic alienation of STs and asked for further reform.

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**History of the Program:** In 1991, Ravi Kuchimanch, an Indian graduate student at the University of Maryland, visited organizations that only discussed needs in India. However, Ravi wanted to “take action.” So he and other students passionate about working with under-privileged Indian communities founded AIDIndia. AID launched chapters in 1994 and was incorporated in 2003. With 1,000 volunteers and 36 active chapters across the US today, AID has 365 projects. They have worked with MBBCDS since 2007. MBBCDS has been helping tribal women for more than 10 years.

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**The Project:** DFW's gift will help support women who live in Mohammed Bazar block's economically backward villages, through MBBCDS's **Holistic Empowerment of Tribal Women through Group Development Initiatives** project. Women will be selected for the project based on their socio-economic status and their aptitude for a particular vocation. They will be divided into 100 self-help groups (SHGs), based on geographic proximity, compatible vocational choice, similar development problems and other criteria. These groups will participate in a number of initiatives designed to alleviate the disadvantages that tribal women in India encounter daily.

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**Why Needed:** In West Bengal, the socio-economic status of tribal women is dismally low, and gender inequality is rampant in the Mohammad Bazar block. Women face oppression

due to gender, caste, religion, patriarchy and tradition. Girls born in these tribes must overcome a world of low literacy rates, few job opportunities for women, little knowledge about reproductive health and feminine hygiene, and prevalent malnutrition, mental health problems, and domestic and social violence. In all tribal hamlets, a woman's priority is the survival of her family. Traditionally, tribal women could survive on the area's meager income/resources. But national socio-economic changes have



created instability in the tribes' livelihood. For example, employing advanced technologies actually hinder development since most tribes are illiterate and removed from technology, information and resources. A few tribal families depend on small plots of land that produce inadequate quantities of food crops due to poor farming practices. Because most families depend on daily wages and are underpaid, tribes borrow from vicious moneylenders. These lenders charge high interest rates and alter payment records, which causes ceaseless debt for tribal families. Often, men suffer from chronic alcoholism that leads to frustration, violence against women and children and an inability support their families. The vicious circle of poverty, debt, discrimination, illiteracy and fear of corrupt politicians keeps these remote tribal women even farther from development.

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**Program Accomplishments:** AID has been working with MBBCDS on the education of tribal children by establishing child growth centers. AID is impressed with the dedication and professionalism of their secretary, Mrs. Ayesha Khatun, and other staff members. MBBCDS is one of the leading NGOs in Birbhum. It has sponsored more than 200 self-help groups for the poor, 98% of which are women's groups. MBBCDS has been promoting the welfare of poor communities, especially women and children, for seven years. MBBCDS projects this project will impact approximately 100 villages in three Development Blocks of two Districts in Birbhum, West Bengal.

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### Goals of the Project

**AID expects their group development initiatives will empower 1,000 tribal women in 16 designated villages of the Mohammed Bazar block.**

Specific goals include:

- ♀ Provide vocational training (e.g. tailoring, hand-embroidery, production of low cost sanitary napkins and production of vermin compost organic fertilizer) for skills development and income generation.
- ♀ Form, strengthen and built the capacity of women's self-help groups.
- ♀ Tackle malnutrition in women by developing a nutrition garden.

- ♀ Address problems of feminine hygiene by generating the awareness and use of low cost sanitary napkins.
- ♀ Eliminate ignorance by installing campaigns and camps on various female issues, such as reproductive health, myths about girl children, puberty, child marriages and violence against women, and support offered by government.
- ♀ Provide women with psychological counseling to escape abusive environments.
- ♀ Provide legal support to female victims of domestic and social violence.

AID believes that the program components will indirectly benefit around 3,000 women.

**Why DFW's funding is vital to this project:** With ‘Holistic Empowerment of Tribal Women through Group Development Initiatives,’ AID can expand the impact of MBBCDS to socio-economic, health and hygiene related issues that affect women in the area. MBBCDS has executed two vocational training programs on the small-scale level. The adapted methodology has already proven successful, wherein the women are able to easily learn the skills and practice the vocation in groups. They have also established business relationships with city vendors who buy products produced by the tribal women. DFW’s funding will give MBBCDS the resources needed to begin training more women with several vocational skills, teaching business training in order to aid them in income generation, and installing other projects that support and guide women in the program. AID says, “The funding support from DFW will be a great help towards successful achievement the program’s goals, thereby improving status of women in the tribal communities of West Bengal, India in various spheres of life.”

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#### **How AID Measures Program Success**

The criteria for evaluating program success depend on the program component. However, general criteria will include:

- Field investigation reports from the training instructors and workshop coordinators of the program, which will show the women’s ability to market produced products, changes in living standards, etc.
- Modes of verification, including program-related photos/videos in the field, program enrollment rates, progress of various SHGs, and interviews with women in the program.
- Surveys conducted at regular intervals will monitor improvement in economic, health and social conditions.

AID sees three groups of independent evaluators visiting the villages and periodically assessing the program: (1) an internal evaluation by MBBCDS, (2) An external evaluation by a steering committee and (3) evaluation by AID itself. Each group will address issues related to successful execution of the program and institute changes, if necessary. Furthermore, AID volunteers during their vacation in India will personally visit the project villages; interact directly with the beneficiaries, trainers and MBBCDS staff; and document observations in the form of a site visit report.

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**Financial Profile:**

Operating expenses: \$1,150,000

Program expenses: \$950,000

Fundraising: \$ 5,169 (0.6 %)

Administrating- Management & General: \$ 36,182 (4.4 %)

**Goal of DFW Gift: \$18,000**

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**Sources:**

AID

Wikipedia.org

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