

LET THE LIGHT
OF DEVELOPMENT
SPREAD OVER
THE CHARS

প্রথম 
জাতীয় চর
সম্মেলন
২০১৫

1st NATIONAL CHAR
CONVENTION 2015

June 6, 2015
Krishibid Institution Bangladesh, Khamar Bari, Farmgate, Dhaka



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CREDITS

EDITORS

Asif Imran Khan
Fahmida Afroz
M. Anowar Hossain
Matthew Pritchard
Md. Kamal Uddin
Md. Mozahidul Islam
Sadiah Hossain
Stuart Kenward
Zahid Rahman

MEMBERS

Bodrud-Doza Zion
Faima Rahman Jui
Farhana Yasmin
Nahid Hossain
Navina Aziza Kabir
Reazul Islam
Samantha Shahrin
Sharif Delwar Rahman
Tanbir Chowdhury
Priangka Das

PHOTO

Chars Livelihoods Programme
Frameln Productions
Unnayan Shamannay

DESIGN & PUBLICATION

Naksha Impressions Ltd.

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CONTEXT



Convention Context

Char areas in Bangladesh remain one of the most isolated, deprived and backward regions in the country. The chars of north-west Bangladesh, for instance, cover a large part of the riverine country. These lands, comprising 100 upazillas in 32 districts, are home to a population of around 6 million people. Some of the char lands are connected to the mainland; however most of the char areas, especially in the coastal regions, are characterised by extreme geographical seclusion. The remote island chars in the Padma, Teesta and Jamuna riverine areas can take many hours to reach from the mainland. Similarly, char areas in Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Lalmonirhat and Pabna districts are almost inaccessible and detached from mainland activities in almost all aspects of life.

The unique conditions of the chars mean that char-dwellers, particularly the extreme poor, are highly vulnerable. Deprivation in all basic needs of life such as food security, agricultural development, health, education, habitation, and empowerment serve to make it almost impossible for the poor to rise above the poverty cycle. The scarce earning and employment opportunities are exacerbated by natural disasters. Women living in char areas are among the worst affected, as they are denied an equal say in decision-making in family and community. Dowry, child marriage, gender-based violence, and restriction in the movement of women are more prevalent in the chars than on the mainland. Wealthy interest groups control access to land, while social safety nets targeted at the extreme poor are frequently captured by the non-poor. Geographical isolation and poor governance thus contribute to making the chars an extreme poverty pocket in Bangladesh.

At the same time, the chars possess great potential, not only to help alleviate the poverty of its people, but also to contribute to national development. The experience of the international and local organisations shows that practical, innovative and adaptable approaches can work amidst the unique conditions of the chars.

In order to address the extreme poverty of the chars and bring sustainable change, a comprehensive national plan and special interventions are required. Although it is increasingly recognised that the chars need assistance to alleviate poverty, national development policy makers and planners have yet to focus on longer-term sustainable development strategies for the chars. The budgetary allocation for infrastructure and service provision does not consider the unique requirements of the conditions imposed by the chars' geographical situation. Access to health and education services and agricultural extension is limited in char areas due to their isolation and lack of accountability of the service providers. The remoteness of the chars leads to high staff vacancies and absenteeism due to poor supervision and a weak accountability system.

The 1st National Char Convention 2015 thus came as a response to the necessity of focusing the concentrated attention of the government and policy makers on the deserving population of Bangladesh's char areas. More than 70 organisations had come on board to campaign for this cause. The Convention brought together the government, policy makers, donors, international, national and local NGOs, researchers, academicians, development activists, and representatives from Community Based Organisations (CBO) from the chars. More than 1,200 people had participated in this Convention, half of whom were char dwellers.

With the slogan 'Let the Light of development spread over the Chars', this unprecedented national event's aim was to end all discrimination, and determine a consolidated way forward out of poverty for all char dwellers.

Major Objectives of the 1st National Char Convention 2015

- To raise a collective voice, draw policy makers' attention and mobilise resources to char areas with a view to addressing the many sufferings of char dwellers.
- To highlight the responsibility of stakeholders to ensure that different services reach remote areas.
- To declare the 1st National Char Convention Declaration as the 'Char Peoples' Demand Charter', exploring development issues based on concrete studies conducted by different organisations.





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1st NATIONAL CHAR
CONVENTION 2015

৬ জুন ২০১৫

কৃষিবিদ ইনস্টিটিউশন
বাংলাদেশ
খামারবাড়ি রোড, ক
ঢাকা

SUMMARY



SUMMARY

The **1st National Char Convention 2015** was successfully held on Saturday, 6 June, 2015 at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh (KIB) Complex in Khamar Bari Road, Farmgate, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The Convention was met with great enthusiasm and spirit by the char people, honourable guests, participating organisations, and media personnel. In addition to the inaugural and closing sessions, six technical sessions were organised in the three halls of KIB Complex with full attendance of the participants. A total of 14 papers were presented by different organisations during these technical sessions which were held simultaneously. The Honourable Speaker of the Bangladesh Parliament, Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP inaugurated the Convention as the chief guest. The chairperson of the National Char Alliance and the National Committee of the Char Convention, Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled was present as the chairperson in the inaugural session, while Honourable Minister of Social Welfare Syed Mohsin Ali, MP was present as the chief guest in the closing session.



Prior to the Convention, a general meeting was held at Chhayanaut Bhaban in Dhanmondi, Dhaka on 25 May, 2015. The meeting was attended by the chair, vice-chairs and members of the Char Convention National Committee, representatives of the participating organisations, members of the National Char Alliance, and representatives from the char. Building up to the Convention, the meeting served to share the progress and schedule of the convention. The participants reaffirmed their commitment to the cause, and provided their suggestions to make the Convention successful.



The pre-convention general meeting was followed by a press conference on 27 May, 2015 at the National Press Club Conference Lounge where the information about the first ever char convention was disseminated among the media actors. The chairperson of National Committee of the Char Convention, Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled highlighted the issues of the char dwellers and the necessity of a collective movement such as the convention to draw adequate attention of the policy makers in the well-attended press conference. M. Anwar Hossain, Member Secretary and Coordinator of Char Convention National Committee, and the Head of Technical Unit at Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh then shared the specific objectives of the convention, and read out the demands made through grassroots level consultation on behalf of the char people. The press conference generated a positive response, and was well covered by the electronic and print media.

The enthusiasm and commitment of the stakeholders in the general meeting and the press conference seemed to have amplified on the day of the Convention as the participants started arriving and registering for the Convention from early morning. All received a bag comprising the pre-convention publication, schedule, poster, t-shirt and a host of materials on the convention. On the day, the KIB Complex was well decorated with colourful banners, posters and information boards. As a part of the Dhaka city campaign, various city points were decorated with colourful banners and festoons.

During the inaugural session, Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury stated that the government believes in implementing an inclusive development plan from which no region is excluded. The Speaker urged the Members of the Parliament to work together to ensure overall development of char areas by including

the needs of the char people in the government's development plans. Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled demanded the formation of a dedicated 'National Char Commission' or 'Foundation' with representatives of the concerned ministries and the NGOs to alleviate the impoverished condition of the char dwellers.

The six technical sessions held on the issues of human capital, access to and control over resources, agriculture, national policy, climate change and human rights related to char lands resulted in productive and rich discussions. Members of the Parliament, policy makers, civil society leaders, dignitaries, development specialists and practitioners present at those sessions shared their views, experiences and suggestions for the development of char lands.

A major feature of the Convention was the participation of the char people themselves. Coming from various char regions of the country, the char dwellers actively engaged in the discourse of the sessions and boldly asserted their demands to the policy makers and stakeholders. Particularly, the women from the char unreservedly shared the issues affecting them and effectively upheld their demand to the policy makers to bring sustainable improvements to their lives. Alongside, the convention highlighted that agriculture, education, healthcare, communication infrastructure, income generating activities, inclusion and accessibility to government's safety net programs, climate change, land management, use of ICT are imperative to ensure rights based, dignified and equality sustainable livelihood of char dwellers.



The 1st National Char Convention culminated in a 38 Point Char Declaration that was read out by M. Anowar Hossain, Member Secretary and Coordinator, during the closing session of the Convention. Finally, a 14 point Declaration was prepared encompassing issues of the 38 Point demand and in line with the constitution of Bangladesh, and national and international commitment.

This 14 Point Char Declaration will be placed before the Honourable Speaker of the Parliament by a high-profile committee led by Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled. Additionally, the Declaration will serve as a consolidated mandate to forward the demands made by char people to all development actors in Bangladesh.





SPEECH GALLERY





“ I hope that government will pay the necessary attention to address the special conditions of the char dwellers in its comprehensive and equitable national development plan. Char dwellers are citizens of our country as well. I am confident that the national development plan will serve to benefit the char dwellers and help to improve their lives.”

— **Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP**,
Honourable Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament and
Chairperson, Commonwealth Parliamentary
Association

“ I believe that through interventions in education and health, we can make a big contribution in the human development in char. If it is continued for three to five years the char people themselves can take the charge in changing their luck. The collaboration of government organisations, NGOs and private sector should pave the way for eradicating char poverty.”

— **Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled**, Chairman, 1st
Char Convention National Committee



“ We recognise the aspiration of Bangladesh to be a middle income country by 2021 but want this transition to be inclusive so that all Bangladeshis including 6 million people from isolated island chars across 100 upazilas of 32 districts can be part of the development.”

— **Priya Powell**, Counsellor, Head of
Development Cooperation, Australian Department
of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)





“ The government have to play active role to free the char dwellers from the chains of discrimination, negligence, and deprivation. Not only that, development in the chars is essential to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). “Let the light of development spread over the chars”- is our vision and hope from the 1st National Char Convention 2015.”

— **M. Anowar Hossain**, Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh; and Member Secretary and Coordinator, 1st Char Convention National Committee

“ The fighting spirit of char people is equalled by the fertility of the land. If the agriculture department’s engagement with the agricultural activities of the char dwellers is effective, then I believe that a green revolution in the fertile land of chars is imminent.”

— **Mahindra Nath Roy**, Representative of Char land



“ Surely the government has been planning and operating many programmes, yet more comprehensive initiatives are necessary for the char regions. We cannot reach the status of middle income country leaving the char dwellers behind, nor can we make the development sustainable. I believe the Convention will help us to present specific recommendations to the government.”

— **A.K.M. Musha**, Country Director, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh and Vice- Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee





“ It is the state’s responsibility to ensure the basic education and health care in the char areas. We demand the state to ensure these. Budget allocations for education and health care services to be increased. At the same time, steps should be taken to implement these as well.”

— **Rasheda K Chowdhury**, Executive Director, CAMPE and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

“ We are hopeful that special allowance will be allocated for the char teachers and doctors in the next fiscal year. Sustainable development is very important for char. Let’s all start a movement together to see to development of char, and its education and health service delivery system.”

— **Md. Motahar Hossain, MP**, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Bangladesh Parliament



“ I believe that a master plan is needed as a solution for the challenges of char areas. The government needs to be fully supportive of the master plan and ensure that the support is reflected in the budget.”

— **Shabel Firuz**, Country Director, Islamic Relief, Bangladesh and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee





“ Women need to be prioritised in distributing khas land. The concept that a woman is not eligible to receive khas land without a capable son is invalid. Women are very capable of taking care of their own land. The prevailing policy in khas land distribution has to be modified.”

— **Khushi Kabir**, Coordinator, Nijera Kori

“ The distribution of khas land needs to be done transparently. The selection process must be free of error, while the selection needs to be conducted openly at the grass roots.”

— **A.K.M. Zahangir Hossain, MP**, Former State Minister, Ministry of Textiles and Jute



“ Women empowerment and poverty alleviation are two intertwined concepts. We have to keep this in mind while working for char development.”

— **Shaheen Anam**, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee





“Agriculture is the source of livelihood for the char dwellers. In order to develop the agricultural sector in char, provision of quality seeds, arrangement of training and marketing of agricultural products need to be ensured. The lives of the char people can be improved if the government programmes are more complementary to the char realities.”

— **Dr. Abdur Razzak, MP**, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Parliament and Former Minister, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management.

“Despite the allocation of 50 crore taka in the last budget, it has not been spent. The same amount has been allocated in this budget as well. All the stakeholders need to work collaboratively and take projects to ensure the utilisation of the fund.”

— **Md. Abdul Wadud, MP**, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Food, Bangladesh Parliament



“Chars are usually associated with poverty and deficiencies. However, we need to highlight the potential of the chars. That will encourage the private sector’s investment in the regions.”

— **Anowarul Haque**, Director, Extreme Rural Poverty, CARE Bangladesh



“ Special provisions need to be created for the coastal char areas. Government needs to take projects to install solar panels to ensure the supply of electricity in char areas.”

— **Fazle Hossain Badsha**, Honourable MP, Rajshahi-2, Bangladesh Parliament

“ The Perspective Plan and the Sixth Five Year Plan comprehensively lay out the plan for development. But they need to be implemented properly to achieve the desired results.”

— **Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad**, Director (Honourary) and Chairman of Governing Council, Dhaka School of Economics and Chairman, PKSF



“ Public hearings need to be conducted in the char areas where the women and men can share and identify their issues and solutions. It is essential to incorporate the findings in the government and development organisations’ programmes to ensure real development of the char people.”

— **Md. Mokbul Hossain, MP**, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh Parliament





“ I think it is not necessarily the best approach to say that the government, NGOs or private sector should lead the existing ideas and solutions forward. The example of CLP shows that when you get many stakeholders working together, things can be done very effectively.”

— **Matthew Pritchard**, Team Leader, Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP)

“ There are about 100 social safety net programmes being operated in the country that the government distributes among the marginalised people without foreign assistance. In distribution, it needs to be emphasised that the actual target groups are being reached with the intervention.”

— **Dr. Md. Khairul Islam**, Country Director, WaterAid Bangladesh and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee



“ The frequency of natural calamities has increased but so has the people’s capability to adapt. As the Chairman of the Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Environment and Forest, I will raise the issue to update the ‘Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan’ with the current context.”

— **Dr. Muhammad Hasan Mahmud, MP**, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Environment and Forest, Bangladesh Parliament and Former Minister for Environment and Forest Ministry

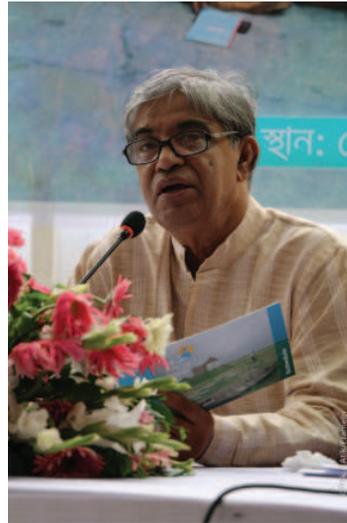


“ It is important to keep track report of the government officials who do not respond properly to the inquiries and necessities of the people. There is also the need to study the performance of the public and private sectors, as well as NGOs in service delivery of human rights.”

— **Dr. Dipu Moni, MP**, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairperson, All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Human Rights, Bangladesh Parliament, and Former Minister for Ministry of Foreign Affairs

“ Education, skill, technology and connectivity are key to the development of char. I believe that technology such as mobile phone and internet can be a great source of empowerment for char people.”

— **Mustafa Jabbar**, President, Bangladesh Computer Samity and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee



“ The financial allocation for char development in the National Budget for the last two years is indeed positive news. The current government is strongly determined for the development of char. What is needed is collective effort of the char actors for the development of the char dwellers.”

— **Shishir Shil**, Secretary General, All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), Bangladesh Parliament and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee



“ We think that individual or stand-alone activities might bring some temporary changes, but to build sustainable and equity based development to improve the livelihoods and living standards of the char people, there is no alternative to a collective effort.”

— **Snehal V. Soneji**, Country Director, Oxfam in Bangladesh and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

“ There needs to be much greater investment in the Chars. We call on the Government of Bangladesh to prioritise investment in the Chars and other ‘pockets of extreme poverty’ under the new 7th Five Year Plan and develop a Char Commission to drive this forward.”

— **Sarah Cooke**, Head of DFID Bangladesh



“ The government is determined to improved the conditions of the char dwellers. All actors, including the government, development organisations and the char dwellers have to work collaboratively to bring sustainable change.”

— **Syed Mohsin Ali, MP**, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare





“ We need different policy prescriptions for the char people. Interest free loan, collateral loan or special quota needs to be provided to assist them out of poverty.”

— **Dr. Mohammad Abu Eusuf**, Professor, Department of Development Studies, and Director, Centre on Budget and Policy, University of Dhaka

“ People become poorer due to some unequal policies and short sighted plans. For example when we provide micro credit services to the poor, 20% interest rate is charged. But when it comes to big businesses, 6% interest rate is charged by the organisations such as ADB and other international banks.”

— **M.B. Akhter**, Programme Manager, Oxfam in Bangladesh



“ Advocating for budget allocation is important but it is also a matter of responsibility to ensure proper utilisation of the allocated budget for the betterment of the char people. As NGOs, we should play a responsible role in this regard.”

— **Runa Khan**, Executive Director, Friendship





Key Findings from the study

- Reading fluency of the char school students is only 14.73 CWPM and only 11% could touch the 45 words (The minimum Standard level of fluency is ≥ 45 -60 CWPM)
- Performance (reading level) of the Grade II students – independent level: 9%, instructional level: 31% and frustration level: 59%
- Particular gaps were observed in Lack of phonological awareness, Weak in phonetics/ letter and word recognition, Lack of Vocabulary, Weak fluency and inferential (comprehension) capacity
- Adult literacy rate is only 25%
- 70% schools experienced loss of contact hours (<800) due to natural hazards
- Significant/no NGOs are working on education in the areas



RESEARCH PAPERS



IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN THE ISOLATED CHARS OF BANGLADESH



IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION IN THE ISOLATED CHARS OF BANGLADESH

Md. Siddique Ali, Project Coordinator, Concern Worldwide

Abstract

Education has a pivotal role in the creation of not only human capital, but also social change, especially the making of a progressive, democratic society that values sustainable development, economic growth and poverty reduction. A World Bank survey (1999) revealed that the income of graduates from primary, secondary and tertiary level of education earn 52.6%, 7.2% and 15.2% more, respectively, in comparison to those who do not complete each educational cycle. Investment in education results in returns in other sectors, such as health, agriculture etc. Considering the importance of education, especially primary education, Bangladesh has prioritised it in national development strategies, with the objective to attain its vision 2021. Despite many challenges, the present government of Bangladesh has made remarkable achievements in terms of access to education (Net enrolment rate: 96.3%; Gross enrolment rate: 108.6%)¹ as well as in gender parity ratio (1.02). This remarkable achievement, however, has not been spread equal across Bangladesh, with marked variation in success in poor areas such as the *chars*, *haors*², coastal regions, etc.

The combination of isolation, vulnerability and extreme poverty renders life on the chars a potential poverty trap. Approximately 6 million³ people living in char areas are deprived of access to the benefits of government and non-government services.

A recent survey from Concern Worldwide and its implementing partners (secondary information from 10 Upazilas in the northern part of Bangladesh) revealed that a serious challenge exists in access to education on the *chars* due to a shortage of schools. According to the current number of households and school age children (31,058 children aged 5-10 years) only 60% of primary school age children have access to a school. This means that while 92 primary schools were operational in the survey area, at least 155 schools would be required to meet demand).

The study also looked at school infrastructure and the physical condition of the building, finding that 55% of schools in *char* areas were not conducive for learning due to; buildings being made of tin/not sound protected, the fence surrounded the building was broken, the building having a mud floor etc. It was also observed that school furniture such as benches, chairs, desks, blackboards, dusters etc. were not of a usable standard in many *char* schools. In addition, safe drinking water and sanitation facilities were not available in 28% of schools, despite universally acceptance that a strong correlation exists between the quality of education and the school environment.

1 BANBIES 2013

2 Chars are riverine islands that are accreted and eroded by the action of rivers; haors are areas of marsh and swampland

3 Char context Analysis 2013

Good school governance is crucial in improving the quality of education. A very low level of governance exists in char schools; as the 2013 baseline survey of Concern Worldwide has revealed, only 13% of SMC (school management committee) members are aware of their roles and responsibilities.

Active pedagogy is firmly correlated to improvements in the learning outcomes of students. Effective training significantly contributes to the professional development of teachers who can apply the active pedagogy to ensure quality education. This study revealed that approximately 13% of char school teachers did not receive any pedagogy training, 22% of teaching positions remain vacant for long durations and 57% of teachers live on the mainland; who are frequently absent, arrive late for class and lack enthusiasm for their work, all of which have a negative impact on learning outcomes. Moreover, teachers are disinclined to work in remote *char* schools, and owing to the very high frequency of teachers transferring to schools on the mainland, the teaching-learning situation in *char* schools deteriorates severely.

By introducing child-friendly and child centred teaching-learning approaches, a significant improvement in the quality of education has been attained in schools in certain urban areas and in renowned schools in Bangladesh. Those effective and innovative teaching-learning approaches are completely absent from *char* schools, where a very traditional (banking methods of education, no use of teaching aids etc.) teaching-learning approach is found, which serves as another contributing factor to the low quality of education in the *chars*.

Extreme poverty and malnutrition is another detrimental factor to the quality of education. At least 40% of children suffer from malnutrition in Bangladesh, and in the isolated *char* areas, this rate is significantly higher. The hidden costs of education is another challenge for extreme poor households in supporting the continuation of their children's education, as the representatives of the community consulted in this study (conducted by Concern and its partners) have expressed.

The low adult literacy rate; 25% in NoJ II *chars*⁴, and low community participation in schooling activities has a negative impact on child education. It was observed that, in extreme poor households, parents hold little value in education, preferring to engage their children in activities which will increase of their household income instead of sending to school.

It has also emerged that due to limited resources, the education departments are unable to carry out effective supervision and monitoring of *char* schools, which makes further allowances for the low quality of education in *chars* to continue.

During a disaster, especially during the annual flooding, schooling activities are almost completely suspended on remote *chars* due to teachers' and students' inability to travel to schools regularly.

The low contact hours (<800 hours), insufficient and ineffective teaching-learning space, under-qualified teachers, inactive SMC/PTA, traditional and non-child friendly teaching-learning approach, low governmental and community participation, insufficient teaching materials and poor supervision and monitoring are the major contributing factors to low quality of education.

4 Baseline survey of Char Integrated programme. NoJ II is the name of a project (Nodi O Jibon II -Livelihood Development Project) of Concern Worldwide which works on chars in 9 Upazilas of 4 Districts. The Upazila Pabna Sadar and Bera are in Pabna District; Bagha and Godagari are in Rajshahi District; Chapai Sadar and Shibganj are in Chapai Nawabganj District and Lalmonirhat Sadar, Hatibandha and Kaliganj are in Lalmonirhat District.

A recent assessment of reading skills of 404 grade II students indicates that 59%, 31% and 9% of children are at frustration, instructional and independent level of reading respectively and only 11% of children can read ≥ 45 correct words per minute (**CWPM; n= 90; p= 0.11; SE= 10.34, t= 4.02**) from their respective Bengali books (45-60 CWPM fluency is the minimum level of working memory of human being). The above stated reading levels reveal a lot about the state of the quality of primary education on the *chars*. The low level of basic fluency and inferential skills have emerged as the major challenges to be overcome in this low level of reading skills of the char students. Early grade reading skills are a very important entry into all levels of education. Therefore, it is seen as an area that should be prioritised in *char* education.

It has been observed that little or no non-governmental education actors are working in isolated chars. Similarly, madrasas are also very rarely found in the *chars*. There is a severe scarcity of secondary and higher secondary education on the *chars*; only 8 secondary schools and no higher secondary schools are operating on the *chars*. Therefore, most of the primary school graduates, especially girls, do not have the opportunity to access secondary education. This in turn contributes significantly to high incidences of early marriage, early pregnancy and population growth. *Char* dwellers, particularly the parents of the adolescent girls, do not feel comfortable sending their girls to high schools across the rivers. At the same time, they also have concerns about keeping their daughters idle at home (perception exists that girls may become involved in love and extra marital affairs). Marrying off of their adolescent girls is seen as a common solution in mitigating these concerns, and thus early marriage contributes to high school dropout rates.

The consultation meetings with key education stakeholders comprising of District and Upazila education officials, NGO professionals, SMC, PTA, teachers, community and parents have resulted in some recommendations to improve the quality of *char* education. These are;

- need to increase access by establishing more schools (primary, secondary and higher secondary) in these areas;
- need to acquire appropriate facilities such as effective learning spaces (classrooms), safe drinking water and sanitation facilities (girl-friendly sanitation facilities such as separate toilet for the girls), sufficient school equipment and furniture;
- need to fill all vacant teaching positions and to ensure their presence in chars by motivating them through providing hardship allowance and some other forms of incentives;
- to improve the teachers' professional capacity on active pedagogy (teachers' knowledge, skills, behaviour and experience in classroom teaching);
- to improve school governance by developing professional knowledge and skills of SMC/ PTA and local education departments as well as building the bridge among communities, schools and education departments;
- to introduce alternative learning facilities during floods (boat schools or alternative temporary arrangement);

5 This approach assumes that students will receive limited support from parents and other family members in the household who, in the chars, are likely not to have good literacy / numeracy themselves. As well as a child-centred focus, this approach encourages teachers to provide remedial support for slower learners in school lessons to support effective learning.

- to concentrate on learning competencies and outcomes by developing and following an effective curriculum, teaching-learning materials, adapting the inclusive, child-friendly and “Each Child Learns” approaches;
- to emphasize pre-primary and Early Grade Reading skills through an appropriate curriculum and active pedagogy;
- to address the malnutrition, education opportunity and hidden costs by introducing nutritional support as well as increasing the amount/percentage of social safety net programmes (stipends and other supports for education);
- to strengthen the supervision and monitoring of the local education department by providing necessary supports and logistics.

Introduction

The social and economic progress of Bangladesh in fields such as education, health and poverty reduction has been appreciated and recognised as a development model by international development communities. Despite many daunting challenges such as limited resources (only 2.2% of GDP has been allocated in the national budget for education), political unrest, ineffective supply lines to education and ineffective external efficiency of the education system, the attainment in access to education (NER: 96.3% GER: 108.6% and Gender Parity (GP): 1.02)¹ of Bangladesh indicates great progress in this sector. However, this achievement is not homogenous in Bangladesh; significant disparities can be found in certain poverty pockets such as the *Chars*, *Haors* and coastal regions.

*Chars*² in the river basins of the Padma, Jamuna, Brahmaputra etc., are deprivation traps due to their geographical vulnerability and isolation. Approximately 6 million³ people are living on these chars with inadequate services in (Govt. and NGO) education, health, livelihood and so on, all of which hinder their socio-economic progress. As such, it is imperative that *char* development be prioritised, that poverty, disparity and economic vulnerability be driven out of these regions, if Bangladesh hopes to reach its 2021 goals and advance to the position of a middle-income country.

Objectives:

With the aim of making a cohesive effort to expedite the development progress of the char communities by drawing the attention of national level policymakers and legal duty-bearers to mobilise resources, Concern Worldwide and some other likeminded international and national NGOs took the steps to organise a National *Char* Convention in April 2015. As with the other themes of the convention, the education segment focused on the state of education in the chars. To that end, a study commission was formed with Concern Worldwide; and its implementing team carried out the study covering the remote *chars* of the Padma and Teesta rivers in February 2015.

Limitations:

The study was carried out in a period of political turmoil when people faced difficulties travelling within and between Regions. This greatly hindered the team’s ability to conduct the study smoothly and effectively; it was not possible to provide extensive orientation to the staff engaged in data collection, nor was it feasible to carry out extensive fieldwork, including observation of school activities. In addition to this, the situation also compelled the team to limit discussions to only a few key education stakeholders as it was not possible to move from district to district.

1 BANBIES 2013

2 Chars are the highly unstable areas of deposition/accretion within the meanders of the large rivers – they are essentially new sand or silt islands within the river channels

3 Char context Analysis 2013

Methodology

The qualitative and quantitative information was collected from the char areas in 22 unions of 10 Upazilas, under 3 Districts: Pabna, Lalmonirhat and Chapainawabganj. Research tools such as a secondary data collection template, household surveys, school surveys, reading questionnaires, KII and observation were used to collect information on the current scenario of education in the remote chars in Bangladesh.

Sources of Data:

- Primary data: The community, schools, teachers, students and local education stakeholders, collected using quantitative and qualitative approaches and by stratifying according to sex.
- Secondary data: Upazila level information, baseline reports of the Char Integrated Programme, annual outcome monitoring reports of the char programme.

Quantitative Methods: Sampling of Households, schools and students:

The survey was conducted at two levels: the school level which covered 30 schools with 310 students of class II; and the household level which covered 315 households in 8 Unions of 3 Upazilas (Bera, Aditmary and Chapainawabganj Sadar) under the 3 districts of Pabna, Lalmonirhat and Chapainawabganj.

Using this formula, " $n = z^2 \cdot p \cdot q / e^2$

Where, n = sample size; p = estimated value of success probability; q = estimated value of failures, $z = 1.96$ (95% of confidence level); $e = 3\%$ (0.03) precision rate,"

The sample sizes of the households and school students were calculated. The sample sizes of the household and school surveys by Upazila and district are given below:

a. School survey:

District	Upazila	Union	No. of schools	No. of grade II students		
				Girls	Boys	Total
Pabna	Bera	Masumdia, Paturia, NewVaranga, Old Varanga	10	53	53	106
Chapainawabganj	Chapai Sadar	Narayanpur, Alatuli	11	53	53	106
Lalmonirhat	Hatibandha	Dawabari, Patikapar	9	49	49	98
Total: 3	3	8	30	155	155	310

b) Household survey:

District	Upazila	Union	No. of Households	Remarks
Pabna	Bera	Masumdia, Paturia, NewVaranga, Old Varanga	105	
Chapainawabganj	Chapai Sadar	Narayanpur, Alatuli	105	
Lalmonirhat	Hatibandha	Dawabari, Patikapar	105	
Total: 3	3	8	315	

Qualitative Methods:

The key informants' interviews were conducted with schoolteachers, SMC members, parents, members of the union education standing committee, the Upazila Education Officer (UEO), Assistant Upazila Education (AUEO) officer and District Primary Education Officer (DPEO). Data collection also involved classroom teaching observation and a reading assessment of grade II students in some schools. (It was not possible to organise the focus group discussions due to the political unrest).

Findings and Analysis

This chapter expands on the findings of the study focusing on the areas of access to education, quality of education, school governance and community participation in education in the chars of Bangladesh.

Demographic information –The data collected from the secondary sources has revealed that there are a total of 40,684 households and a population of 2, 15,296, of which 41,487 (19%) individuals are children aged 4-10 years in 22 unions of 09 Upazilas under 3 Districts. The detailed demographic information of the chars by district and Upazila is shown in Annexure I.

Access to and Quality of Primary Education

Island chars are largely excluded from the global trends of technological and social advancement because of a lack of resources like electricity, inadequate healthcare and education and few facilities, recreational opportunities and other services. Char dwellers are constantly fighting against the shocks and threats of natural disasters and man-made problems such as floods, river erosion, and the exclusion of the extreme poor in local governance structures. In spite of these challenges, a positive observation is

that a large number of students attend schools in the chars. Some findings regarding primary education in the chars are cited below:

The number of primary schools in chars

The collected data has revealed that a total of 92 primary schools are currently providing education facilities and services to 25,099 children (of which 54% are girls) in remote island chars. According to number of households and officially school-age children, and in terms of the requirements of quality education, at least 155 primary schools including the pre-primary sections are required to ensure effective education services to the children living in the chars. While 92 (approximately 60% of the requirement) primary schools are available, a further 40% are necessary to provide education for char children.

One issue that emerged in the chars of the Moheskucha Union of Aditmary, Lalmonirhat was that there were no schools (No primary, secondary, Madrasa or NGO schools) in that region; however, there were approximately 1300 households with a population of 10,000—including school-going children. Children from these chars attended schools established on the mainland, which could often be a difficult and risky commute.

It was observed that children coming to these schools often travelled (in many cases up to 6 km) with security risks and other difficulties of road and river communication. All of these challenges have a very strong negative correlation to the quality of education.

Conditions of school infrastructure, buildings and equipment

Conducive school environments are a vital element of effective learning and have a strong positive correlation to the improvement of the quality of education by ensuring attendance and effective classroom interactions. Ideally, these spaces should be attractive, spacious, soundproofed (proper doors, windows etc.) well-lit, well-ventilated and provided with enough benches, tables, blackboards, dusters, fans and other necessary equipment. However, this study revealed that the majority of *char* primary schools did not maintain the required standards of a school environment. 55% of the primary schools were tin-shed houses (not sound-protected) with insufficient school furniture and materials. It was observed that in some schools it was very difficult, if not impossible, to conduct effective classroom activities due to the lack of noise control, damaged benches, unusable blackboards, insufficient lighting and fans etc. The shortcomings of the school environment are a significant factor in the slow progress and low attainment in education in the *chars*.

The state of safe drinking water and sanitation

The availability of safe drinking water and sanitation facilities in schools is essential to students' health and the overall quality of the education environment. WASH studies conducted by different organisations and institutions indicate that safe drinking water and sanitation facilities are strongly

correlated to the students' attendance and contact hours, which are preconditions of improving learning outcomes. It has also been observed that students' attendance at schools with no safe drinking and sanitary facilities is comparatively lower than that of schools having these facilities.

This study revealed that at least 28% of the operating primary schools did not provide safe drinking water and sanitation facilities. The unsatisfactory state of sanitation in schools is another major cause of the slow development of char education.

The state of school governance and accountability

Some schools such as Sibram Govt. Model Primary School in Sundarganj, Gaibandha and Charphils Govt. Model Primary School in Vederganj, Shariatpur are recognized for their quality of education. One of the reasons for their success is the fact that they ensure effective school governance and accountability by strengthening the School Management Committees (SMCs) & Parent Teacher Associations (PTAs), building interactive forums between parents and school teachers, and mobilising communities and resources.

In the *chars*, however, school governance and accountability (as indicated by the 2013 baseline survey of the Char Integrated Programme of Concern Worldwide) is very low; only 13% of the SMC members are aware of their defined roles and responsibilities. According to some of the stakeholders consulted in the process of this study, the remaining 87% inactive members are not only unaware of their responsibilities, they do not contribute to the improvement of education at all; instead, many often support schoolteachers and authorities in hindering accountability and transparency through SLIP and stipend activities. Another obstacle to accountability is the lack of supervision and monitoring from the local education departments. The causes of low supervision are limited logistical support from the relevant government officials, geographical isolation, and the difficulties and time constraints of road and river transportation. An Assistant Upazila Education Officer (AUEO) said that one school in the chars had not been inspected by the Upazila Education Department for 28 years [*The school had been visited in once 1972 and again in 2000, this time by the aforementioned AUEO; between 1972 and 2000, nobody from the education department visited that school*]. While this is a rare case, it still indicates the low level of commitment of local education departments. Thus, low school governance and accountability is one of the key causes of slow progress in *char* education institutions.

Pedagogical aspects

In children's education, pedagogy— especially teaching and discourse— is the chief means of improving learning outcomes. Therefore, it is crucial to ensure that teachers have the appropriate knowledge, experience and practice in active pedagogy. The teachers' commitment and professional skill plays a vital role in applying active pedagogy to the classroom; effective training programmes are a large part of their professional development in this capacity

This study revealed that approximately 13% of *char* schoolteachers had not received any pedagogical training. 22% of the teaching positions had long-term vacancies and 57% of the teachers lived outside

chars, commuting long distances to attend schools (in some cases more than 20 km). These teachers often arrived late and were irregular; and a lack of interest resulted in inefficient classroom teaching – all of which are obstacles to the progress of these schools. Moreover, the reluctance of teachers to work in *char* schools resulted in a high transfer rate for these positions, which further contributed to the deterioration of teaching and learning.

The introduction of updated teaching and learning approaches i.e. participatory, child-friendly, child-centred, activity-based and inclusive approaches in some urban and renowned schools has achieved very positive results in the learning outcomes of the children in Bangladesh. Unfortunately, these approaches are absent from *char* schools. Very traditional methods (banking methods of education, no use of teaching aids etc.) and teacher-centred approaches of learning by rote were observed in the classrooms, which is why the quality of education in the *chars* is much lower than in other areas.

Co-curricular activities

Curriculum and co-curricular activities are complementary determinants of children’s development; both of these elements of education simultaneously contribute to their cognitive, psychomotor, social and emotional growth. As such, co-curricular practices are indispensable to providing an education that equips students to meet global standards of knowledge, skills and understanding.

This study revealed the appalling state of current co-curricular activities in *char* schools: almost all of the schools lacked a suitable playground and did not provide sports materials and musical instruments. Furthermore, teachers had very limited knowledge of co-curricular activities and therefore did not have them carried out in most of the schools. The study also found that some schools did have footballs but these were locked away because the campus had no playgrounds to use.

Other detrimental factors

Extreme poverty and malnutrition is a detrimental factor of education; at least 40% of the children suffer from malnutrition in Bangladesh and this rate is significantly higher in isolated *chars*. In addition, the opportunity and hidden costs of education are another disincentive for the extreme poor households to support their children’s education, as the representatives of community consultation in this study expressed. These issues force children to be employed as field labour instead of attending schools.

Low levels of adult literacy (a 25% adult literacy rate in NoJ II *chars*,) and low community participation in schooling activities also have strong negative correlations with the quality of education. It has been observed that the parents in extreme poor households do not expect high returns from educating their children and prefer to have them contribute to the household income. Most parents in these households are illiterate themselves, and are thus unable to provide any kind of academic support at home. They often hinder their children’s education (intentionally or unintentionally) by keeping them occupied with work such as fostering siblings, supporting the mothers in household chores and accompanying the fathers in agricultural work.

Natural disasters also harm educational progress; the yearly floods continually disrupt school activities in the *chars*. This study covered 30 Government primary schools in the *chars* and found that every school (100% of the *char* Schools) experienced loss of contact hours during the flooding periods due to the teachers' and students' inability to attend regularly and punctually. Disrupted road and river communication, the lack of boats and inundated roads massively hindered children's' education during the flood season. Many schools also remain closed during the flood season due to inundation of the school buildings; the consequent loss of time means that teachers and students are unable to complete the syllabi within the academic year.

Learning outcomes of primary school children

Primary school learning outcomes depend on the enabling factors and input provided by the parties involved; the lack of this attention on the part of the stakeholders, including the government of Bangladesh, is at the root of the stunted development of education and learning in the *chars*. An assessment was conducted on the reading skill levels of 404 Grade II students in 30 *Char* schools. The results indicated that only 9% and 31% of the children were at independent and instructional levels of reading skill respectively; a larger 59% of the children were at the frustration level of reading skill, which is an alarming indication of the low standards of education in the *chars*.

Global research on literacy has revealed that the minimum level of reading fluency required for young children (up to Grade III) to comprehend or draw inferences from a read text is 45-60 correct words per minute. In order to assess the reading fluency of Grade II children, an in-depth survey was conducted with 90 students from 3 schools. The results indicated that the average score of correct words per minute was 14.73; only 11% of children could read ≥ 45 correct words per minute ($n=90$, $mean = 14.73$, $S.E = 10.34$, $t=4.02$).

These results clearly represent the poor condition of the quality of education in the *chars* in Bangladesh. They reflect the students' weak foundational, basic, fluency and inferential skills, all of which lead to inadequate learning outcomes. The low contact hours (<800 hours), insufficient and ineffective teaching-learning spaces, untrained teachers, inactive SMC/PTA, traditional and non-child friendly teaching-learning approaches, low governance and community participation, insufficient materials and negligence in supervision and monitoring have emerged as the major contributing factors for the unsatisfactory state of education of children in *char* schools.

States of Secondary, Higher Secondary and Tertiary Education

A lack of secondary and higher secondary institutions indicates an even worse situation for higher levels of education. Only 8 secondary schools and no higher secondary institutions were found in 10 Upazilas of the 3 Districts cited earlier in this report. As a result, most of the primary school graduates, especially the girls, do not receive secondary education because of the lack of schools nearby. Only a few female students from highly motivated families attend secondary schools further away. As mentioned earlier, the risks and inconveniences of travelling long distances to attend school is a major disincentive for families; even more so in the case of secondary education. One indication of the commuting troubles these

secondary-school students (both boys and girls) face is the fact that many carry 2 sets of clothes to school: one to cross the river in and the other to wear in the classroom.

The absence of secondary education facilities in close proximity is, in turn, a contributing factor to increasing early marriages, pregnancies and population growth in the *chars*. During the study, it was observed that *Char* dwellers, particularly the parents of adolescent girls, felt insecure about sending their daughters to high schools across the water; nor did they want to keep them 'idle' at home (the main reason for this is the perception that the daughters would become involved in pre-marital affairs). Marriage was seen as the solution to these worries; thus, marrying off adolescent girls resulted in a high dropout rate in secondary school.

Tertiary education is still a far-off possibility for most *char* dwellers. Almost 100% of the children have no access to university education because they are unable to achieve the performance levels required at the primary and secondary levels. The financial pressures of university education are also beyond the means of most *char* families. The rare few who do have access to post-secondary education are usually students who are naturally talented to begin with.

These issues have created a vacuum of higher education graduates among *char* dwellers; they are unable to access government services or be recruited as schoolteachers – all of which further contributes to the slow socio-economic development of the *char* communities.

Presence of Non-governmental Organisations and Private Institutions:

Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) and private institutions play significant cooperative and supplementary roles in the education sector of Bangladesh. Many NGOs implement education programmes and projects across the country. Unfortunately, this study noted a dearth of such programs in the *char* regions. A comparatively insignificant number—none, in some cases—of these non-governmental actors worked in *char* education; similarly, the number of Madrasas present in the *chars* was very small.

Recommendations for Improvement

This study conducted a series of consultation meetings with different levels of education stakeholders such as the parents of primary-school children, SMC & PTA members, education ambassadors and patrons, members of Union Education Standing Committees, Assistant Upazila Education Officers (AUEO), Upazila Education Officers (UEO), District Primary Education Officers (DPEO) and NGO representatives in order to explore the ways of improving the quality of education in the *chars*. The following views and recommendations emerged as the paths to improve *char* education:

Increasing access to educational opportunities in chars

The insufficient number of schools and colleges obstruct the access to all levels of education, from early childhood and primary schooling to secondary and higher education. This also affects the quality of education of *char* children by causing overcrowding in the existing schools (limited learning spaces with

many children as well as a high teacher-to-student ratio) and forces many to attend schools far from home. Therefore, establishing a greater number of schools and colleges in remote and isolated *chars* will improve access to all levels of education. It will also significantly help the country in attaining equitable and inclusive education as a post-2015 education goal (one of the sustainable development goals for 2030).

Creating conducive learning environments in char schools

The learning environments of *char* schools are greatly compromised by the lack of appropriate school buildings, furniture, and equipment; as well as a lack of safe drinking water and appropriate sanitation facilities. School environments that include safe drinking water and sanitation facilities have a significant positive correlation to the quality of education, particularly the factors of attendance and student contact hours. Improving the environment and the sanitation facilities of *char* schools, therefore, will help raise the quality of the services that these schools can provide.

Filling vacant teaching and administration positions in char schools

Many positions of teachers and head-teachers are vacant in *char* schools; this hinders school functionality greatly. It is necessary, not only to fill these positions, but also to keep them filled by providing adequate support and incentives, such as hardship allowances.

Improving professional capacity and commitment among *char* schoolteachers. The lack of professional development and commitment of the teachers in following active pedagogy has a negative impact on *char* education. Providing training to assess and improve teachers' knowledge, skills, behaviour and experience in classroom teaching is a crucial step to cultivating professionalism and integrity in contributing to the development of educational practices in the *chars*.

Improving school governance

If *char* education is to be improved, there is no alternative to establishing and maintaining effective school governance systems in these isolated areas. This requires the active participation of SMCs, PTAs and the community. As with teachers and administrators, these bodies also require professional development to make them aware of their responsibilities. Effective governance involves bridging the communication gaps between communities, schools and education departments, and ensuring mutual accountability and transparency in school activities. The supervision and monitoring by local education departments should also be strengthened by providing capacity development and logistical support to further improve accountability in *char* education.

Arranging alternative learning facilities during disasters, especially in flood season

Natural disasters are a common phenomenon in Bangladesh and *chars* are some of the most disaster-prone areas. Every year, they are affected by floods that disrupt education by inundating schools, houses and roads and ruining teaching materials. The lack of alternative teaching spaces means that schools remain closed during these times. It is imperative that alternative school accommodations be arranged e.g. as boat schools or temporary structures to prevent education from being continually disrupted by disaster.

Introducing active pedagogy with sufficient teaching-learning materials and aids

Innovative teaching and learning approaches and methodologies are present in many reputable schools to improve the students' quality of education. It is necessary to adapt active pedagogy, effective curriculum practices and inclusive and child-friendly teaching-learning materials in the *char* classrooms as well.

Including effective early childhood development (ECD) and pre-primary education

The effectiveness of ECD and Pre-primary education is integral to higher standards of education. These levels are greatly dependent school environment, teaching-learning materials and teachers' professional knowledge, attitude and behaviour. Therefore, the concerned authorities should place emphasis on establishing ECD and pre-primary education by introducing learning spaces, materials and teacher training in *char* schools.

Addressing poverty-related issues e.g. malnutrition, opportunity and hidden education costs

Poverty is a very complex phenomenon and is at the root of these problems. The resulting lack of nourishment and the opportunity and hidden costs of education are detrimental factors in *char* education. Introducing nutritional support and increasing the amount and proportion of social safety net programmes (school stipends and other forms of support for education) will help stakeholders address the poverty-related issues in education.

Conclusion

The current demographic situation of Bangladesh provides a unique opportunity to encourage economic growth, reduce poverty and improve the standard of living to that of a middle-income country. However, the human capital potential of this large population of children and youth can be tapped only by providing a high quality of education. Global studies such as the World Bank Survey '99 have revealed that education is the most effective and influential instrument in poverty reduction. According to the survey, the incomes of primary, secondary and tertiary education graduates increase by 52.6%, 7.2% and 15.2% respectively, in comparison to those who have not achieved these levels of education. . Another study indicates that an additional year of schooling can increase a person's earnings by 10% and the average annual GDP by 0.37% (Hanushek et al., 2008, cited in UNESCO, 2010). The *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2013/4* shows that an increase in the average educational attainment of a country's population by one year increases annual per capita GDP growth from 2% to 2.5%' (UNESCO, 2014). In addition to this, investment in education brings returns from not only the education sector but also from all other sectors such as health, agriculture etc.

This study shows that significant inequalities exist in *char* education, which must be addressed if Bangladesh is to attain the 2021 goals. As such, it is vital that the government of Bangladesh and the national and international education actors/stakeholders concentrate on improving the situation of *char* education by addressing the diverse needs related to the access and quality of education.

Annexures

Annexure I: Demographic information of chars by Upazila and District

District	Upazila	No. of Unions	No. of Chars	No. of Households	Total Population	No. of children aged 4-5 years			No. of children aged 6-10 years		
						B	G	T	B	G	T
Lalmonirhat	Hatibandha	3	9	3290	17912	512	559	1071	1028	1086	2114
	Aditmary &Khaliganj	2	4	683	2676	111	106	217	121	136	257
Pabna	Bera	6	14	13300	69770	4330	3110	7740	2730	1930	4660
	Sadar	2	3	3453	13251	352	422	774	1137	1573	2710
Rajshahi	Bagha	3	7	3629	18893	371	287	658	756	751	1507
	Godagari	2	5	4500	24450	307	326	633	901	941	1952
Chapai-Nawabganj	Shibganj	2	6	6756	34904	1923	2122	4630	1035	1265	2300
	Sadar	2	7	5073	33439	2209	2916	5135	2275	2986	5261
4	9	22	55	40684	215296	10115	9848	20858	9983	19668	20629

Source: data collected by the implementing partners of Char Integrated Programme in February 2015

Annexures

Annexure II: Organised data of the reading score of 90 students of grade II

Class Interval (CI)	Frequency (f)	Mid value (x)	fx	$\bar{X} = \frac{\sum fx}{n}$	$(X - \bar{X})$	$(X - \bar{X})^2$	$f(X - \bar{X})^2$
0-10	59	5	295	14.73	-9.73	94.63	5583.15
11-20	11	15.5	170.5	14.73	0.77	0.59	6.52
21-30	6	25.5	153	14.73	10.77	115.99	695.96
31-40	4	35.5	142	14.73	20.77	431.39	1725.57
41-50	2	45.5	91	14.73	30.77	946.79	1893.59
51-60	6	55.5	333	14.73	40.77	1662.19	9973.16
61-70	1	65.5	65.5	14.73	50.77	2577.59	2577.59
71-80	1	75.5	75.5	14.73	60.77	3692.99	3692.99
Σ	90	323.5	1325.5	-	205.66	9522.18	26148.53

Source: data collected by the implementing partners of Char Integrated Programme in February 2015

HEALTHCARE SEEKING BEHAVIOR AND FACILITIES AVAILABLE IN CHAR AREAS OF BANGLADESH



HEALTHCARE SEEKING BEHAVIOR AND FACILITIES AVAILABLE IN CHAR AREAS OF BANGLADESH

**Md. Khalequzzaman¹, Mohammad Abdullah Al Mamun², Md. Ataur Rahman²
Sohel Reza Choudhury², Syed Shariful Islam¹**

¹Department of Public Health and Informatics, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib Medical University, Shahbag, Dhaka

²Department of Epidemiology and Research, National Heart Foundation Hospital and Research Institute, Mirpur, Dhaka

Abstract

In Bangladesh, despite the progress in the health sector and the increase of healthcare services, the access to these services is not yet fully equalized throughout the whole country. Life of people of *char* areas in Bangladesh can be exceptionally challenging. Due to the problematic presence and accessibility of healthcare services on *char* areas we were interested to know health seeking behavior and facilities available in *char* areas of Bangladesh. Thus, we have conducted a cross sectional study to explore the existing healthcare facilities as well as the health seeking behavior of the people of *Char* in Bangladesh. With a multi stage sample, 432 (four hundred and thirty two) people (216 each from villages of both Gaibandha and Shirajgonj district) were interviewed. Of the respondents, 62% had no formal education. Their average monthly income was 7,234 BDT. All the villages had union health complexes but half of the villages did not have community clinic. Traditionally homeopathy, village doctor, pharmacy personal, kobiraj and hekim are the most available source for treatment for the people of *char* area. Most (66%) of the respondents ranked traditional treatment as first for their choice of healthcare. Availability of the doctor along with the nearer distance was the driving force for selecting them. For more than 90% cases, the reason behind preferring community clinics and union health complexes were provision of free medicine. For Upazila health complex and district hospitals, most were discouraged by the distance of the hospital from the village along with the transportation cost. A large number (67%) of the respondents were found unaware about the NGO healthcare services provided in *char*. From the last 12 months disease history it was evident that cough and/or fevers topped for both the adult family members and children under five years old in the *char*. Average treatment cost for a family in last 12 months was 7,813 BDT. Key source for health information for the *char* dwellers are the government health workers. Our study concludes that with limited formal education most of the *char* dwellers adopted alternative medical practices. Access to health services is one of the main problems where lack of money has consequences for the utilization of health care. Result from the study recommends strengthening of community clinics as well as improvement of communication infrastructure. Increase in literacy rate can drive the *char* dwellers towards the modern health facilities from traditional treatments.

Introduction

Deltas of Brahmaputra, Ganges, and Meghna have created almost 6% land of Bangladesh known as *Char* and these are hard to reach areas (ISPAN FAP, 1993). An estimated 5 to 10 million people live in these *chars* (The University Press Limited, EGIS 2000). Life on *chars* is exceptionally challenging due to extreme poverty, hot and humid weather condition, erosion and flood hazards.

In Bangladesh, despite the progress in the health sector and the increase of healthcare services, the access to these services is not yet fully equalized throughout the whole country. Especially poor people have limited access to basic healthcare services. The healthcare system focuses mainly on rich people or urban elites (Khan et al., 2012). Most of the problems can be found in rural Bangladesh (IRIN, 2009). The infrastructures for service delivery in rural areas operate inefficiently. The poor are more affected by this inefficiency because they lack access to qualitative, curative care (Ahmed et al., 2007). This undermines the health of the population and hinders overall development (Khan et al., 2012). So in spite of some progress, Bangladesh is still confronted with a lot of challenges. *Char* dwellers in Bangladesh are at increased health risks because of (i) lack of safe water supply and sanitation (ii) low education and (iii) unavailability of health services (Thompson, 2000). *Char* dwellers are isolated from government services, from markets, from NGO support due to poor transport and communication (Brocklesby & Hopley, 2003).

There is also a lack of personnel and equipment on the *chars*. Given the difficulties the *char* dwellers face in reaching real healthcare services, many residents opt to use the services of traditional herbal healers, faith healers and tribal magicians (IRIN, 2009).

There are limited information about the existing health facilities and health seeking behavior of the *char* people in Bangladesh. Thus we planned to conduct a study to explore the existing health care facilities as well as the health seeking behavior of the *char* people in Bangladesh.

Methodology

The cross sectional study was conducted in four villages of *char* in Bangladesh. Multistage sampling method was performed to select the study samples. Two districts (Gaibandha and Shirajganj) having *char* was purposively selected. From there one upazila each (Fulchhori and Kazipur), two unions (Uria, Fazlupur, Khash Rajbari and *Char* Girish) from each upazila, One village from each union (Kabilpur, Pashchim Khatiyamari, Bishurigacha and *Char* Natipara), three para from each village were selected. Thirty six samples from each para were selected. Finally 432 *char* dwellers were interviewed with questionnaire. One adult from each household were considered for the interview. Informed consent was obtained from each study participants before data collection.

Results

Table 1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Gaibandha (n=216)	Shirajganj (n=216)	Total (n=432)
Age , mean \pm SD (in Years)	39.3 \pm 15.2	45.2 \pm 15.0	42.2 \pm 15.4
Sex, n (%)			
Male	114 (53)	154 (71)	268 (62)
Female	102 (47)	62 (29)	164 (38)
Education , n (%)			
No Formal Education	114 (53)	152 (70)	266 (62)
Less than Primary	52 (24)	20 (09)	72 (16)
Primary	42 (20)	37 (17)	79 (17)
Secondary and above	8 (03)	7 (03)	15 (03)
Length of stay , mean \pm SD (in Years)	10.0 \pm 9.7	17.9 \pm 10.2	13.9 \pm 10.7
No. of Family members	4.3 \pm 1.5	4.5 \pm 2.0	4.4 \pm 1.8
Monthly Income, mean \pm SD (in Taka)	5252 \pm 3121	9215 \pm 3121	7234 \pm 4833
Source Drinking of Water, n (%)			
Shallow Tube -well	216 (100)	216 (100)	432 (100)
Source of Light, n (%)			
Kupi Bati	100 (46)	49 (23)	149 (35)
Hurricane	4 (02)	12 (06)	16 (04)
Solar Panel	112 (52)	155 (72)	267 (62)
Type of Toilet, n (%)			
Sanitary (with water seal)	90 (42)	21 (10)	111 (26)
Sanitary (without water seal)	97 (45)	167 (77)	264 (61)
Non - Sanitary	27 (13)	26 (11)	51 (12)
Flash Toilet	2 (01)	4 (02)	6 (01)
Household Possession			
Mobile Phone, n (%)	139 (64)	150 (69)	289 (67)
Radio, n (%)	4 (02)	5 (02)	9 (02)
Television, n (%)	23 (11)	34 (16)	57 (13)

Table 2 Existing char health facilities

Facility	Frequency (%)	Distance (in kilometers)	Communication means
Community Clinic	2 (50)	02	On foot By Boat
Union Health Complex	4 (100)	01	On foot By boat
Upazila Health Complex	–	11	On foot By boat Rickshaw Motor Bike
District Hospital	–	32	On foot By boat Rickshaw Motor Bike Public Transport

Table 3 Rank of choice for healthcare facilities

Facility	1 st Ranking n (%)	2 nd Ranking n (%)	3 rd Ranking n (%)
Government Hospital	49 (11)	116 (27)	90 (21)
Private Hospital	5 (01)	16 (04)	16 (04)
Private Chamber	7 (02)	16 (04)	34 (08)
Community Clinic	84 (20)	125 (29)	23 (06)
NGO Clinic	4 (01)	19 (05)	17 (04)
Traditional Treatment	283 (66)	90 (21)	38 (09)

Table 4 Reasons of selecting specific healthcare facility

Facility	Near	Doctor available	Free medicine	Cost Effective Treatment	Better Treatment
Community Clinic	132 (49)	51 (19)	257 (96)	44 (17)	–
Union Health Complex	96 (44)	43 (20)	198 (90)	14 (6)	–
Upazila Health complex	1 (0.5)	90 (48)	66 (35)	31 (17)	144 (77)
District Hospital	–	83 (56)	47 (32)	44 (30)	132 (89)
Private Hospital/Chamber	–	70 (38)	–	–	180 (97)
NGO Clinic	4 (06)	25 (36)	34 (49)	27 (39)	37 (53)
Traditional Treatment	308 (71)	372 (86)	–	124 (29)	170 (39)

Table 5 Reasons of not selecting specific healthcare facility

Facility	Don't Know	Not needed	Distance/Transportation problem	Doctors not available	Costly
Community Clinic	59 (38)	63 (40)	31 (20)	7 (05)	–
Union Health Complex	35 (17)	–	84 (38)	5 (02)	2 (01)
Upazila Health complex	–	–	140 (57)	8 (03)	17 (07)
District Hospital	155 (55)	–	178 (63)	2 (01)	35 (12)
Private Hospital/Chamber	–	181 (74)	26 (11)	–	28 (24)
NGO Clinic	243 (67)	100 (29)	24 (07)	–	5 (01)

Table 6 Common diseases in last 12 months

Disease	Gaibandha	Shirajganj
Children , n (%)		
Cough/ Fever	99 (46)	112 (52)
Diarrhea	24 (11)	18 (08)
Pneumonia	30 (14)	11 (05)
Skin disease	6 (03)	4 (02)
Adults , n (%)		
Fever	203 (94)	190 (88)
Peptic ulcer	72 (33)	43 (20)
Respiratory Tract Infection	52 (24)	11 (10)
Diarrhea	24 (11)	7 (03)
Skin Disease	6 (03)	8 (04)

Table 7 Maternal and child health practices in char

	Frequency	(%)
Visiting health center for Maternal Health Service	213	49
Delivering baby		
In house (trained midwife)	152	35
In house (untrained midwife)	267	62
Govt. delivery centre	6	01
NGO/Non-Govt. delivery centre	7	02
Child Vaccination received	216	50

Figure 1 Source of health information

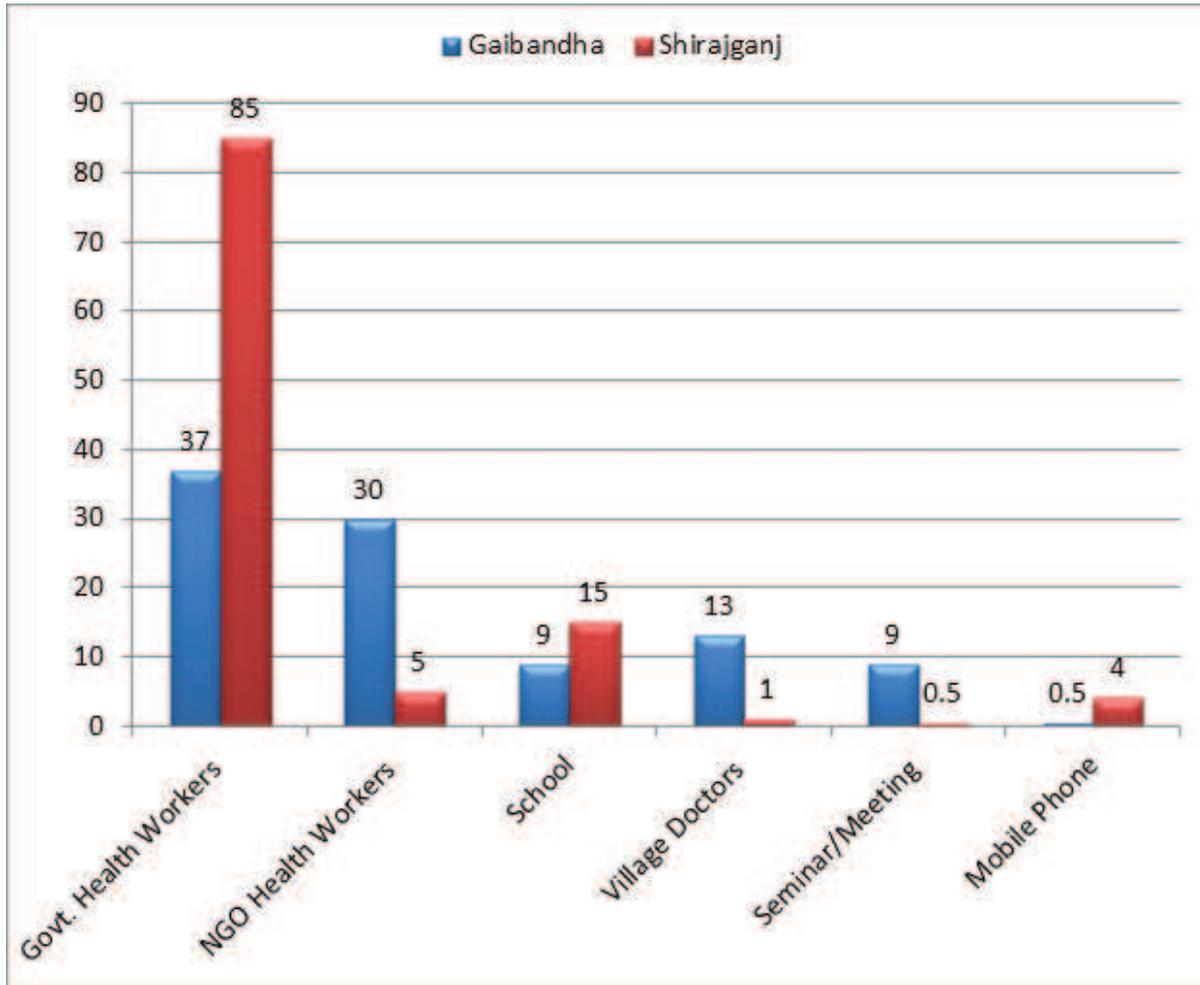


Table 1 shows the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. Study revealed that mean age of the respondents was 42.2 year, of them 62% were male. Regarding educational qualification, majority (62%) of them did not have any formal education. They had family members of 4.4 persons. Their average monthly income was 7,234 BDT. All of the respondents depend on shallow tube well for their source of drinking water. Solar panel was the source of light for 62% of the respondents. Sixty seven percent of the respondents had mobile phones in their possession. A limited number of respondents had television and radio.

Existing *char* health facilities are depicted in Table 2. Half of the villages did not have community clinic (CC) and the average distance for the nearest CC was 2 km. *Char* dwellers usually go to the CC on foot or by boat. All the studied villages had union health complex (UHC) which was 1 km far on an average. The means of communication was similar to CCs. Mean distance for UHC and district hospitals were 11 and 32 km, respectively. The *char* dwellers used rickshaw, motor bike and public transports in addition to foot and boat to reach those facilities.

Rank of choice for health facilities is presented in Table 3. Most (66%) of the respondents ranked traditional treatment as first as their choice for healthcare facilities, where CC was second choice for seeking treatment.

Table 4 and 5 show the background information for selecting or not selecting on facility. It was evident that, the respondents proffered traditional treatment since they were near (71%) and doctors are available (86%). UHCs and CCs were preferred due to the provision of free medicine. The respondents who did not prefer specific healthcare facility mentioned distance as a key factor for not selecting UHC and district hospitals. Majority (67%) of the respondents mentioned that they did not know about the NGO health services provided in the *char*.

Table 6 shows the common diseases from which the *char* dwellers suffered in last 12 months from the time of interview. For children under five years old, cough/fever ranked top in both *chars*. For adults, fever also ranked top as a disease of sufferings. The average treatment cost for the *char* dwellers in last 12 months was found to be 7,813 BDT and about half of the respondents had to pay the treatment cost by taking loan from others (data not shown).

Table 7 shows the maternal and child health practices in *char*. It was found that less than half (49%) of the mothers went to healthcare service centers for maternal health service. For delivering their babies in-house delivery was the choice, where 62% of the deliveries were conducted with untrained dai. Only 50% of the children received vaccination.

Figure one shows the sources of health information for the *char* dwellers. Though there was difference between the *chars* of Gaibandha and Shirajganj, government health workers are the main source of health information for the *char* dwellers.

Conclusion

Char offers a variety of healthcare services which includes community clinics, Upazila health complexes, private chamber, medicine shops, and kobiraj (traditional treatment). With limited formal education most of the *char* dwellers adopted alternative medical practices. Access to health services is one of the main problems where lack of money has consequences for the utilization of health care. Communication problem exists in *char* as a barrier in getting healthcare services. There were lacks of awareness about the existing healthcare facilities in *char* areas.

Recommendations

Based on our study finding following recommendations are made

- Establishment of community clinics is necessary where there is no community clinic. At the same time existing community clinics should be strengthened with manpower and equipments for better service.
- Improvement of communication infrastructure with increase the access to healthcare facilities in *char*.

- Promotional activities for existing healthcare facilities can make the *char* dwellers more aware about the facilities to access.
- Increase in literacy rate can drive the *char* dwellers towards the modern health facilities from traditional treatments.
- Identification of ultra poor and introduction of voucher/opportunity card for them can be a good move to provide necessary treatment for them.

Acknowledgment

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ARE LAND RIGHTS AN ILLUSION FOR THE LANDLESS CHAR DWELLERS?



IS LAND RIGHTS UTTERLY AN ILLUSION FOR LANDLESS CHAR DWELLERS?

Author: **AHM Shamsul Islam Dipu**, Mission Head, SpeedTrust
Co-Author: **Md. Hemayet Uddin**, Project Manager, SpeedTrust

Introduction and Framework of the study

Research Rationale

Land is a limited but indispensable resource for human existence. Unfortunately, various social, political and environmental factors are pushing more and more people towards landlessness. This problem is particularly persistent in Bangladesh, with the number of landless people increasing every year; between 1960 and 1996, the percentage of landless households rose from 19% to an alarming 56 % (A. Barkat, 2004). To the victims of this problem, the rising *chars* in various rivers provide a potential escape from homelessness and poverty, in spite of the many risks and challenges associated with settling there.

According to the land laws of Bangladesh, *Char* land is characterised as *khas* land. While the laws concerning *khas* land are in favour of the landless people and should be available for their use, the reality is that the landless poor are unable to establish their rights to the *chars*. Even after settling on and cultivating the *chars* for many years, land rights remain a complex problem for most *char* dwellers. This *Char* survey was first conducted in 2009 and reviewed in 2014 by SpeedTrust under the project, “Promoting Rights to *Char Khas* Land for Livelihood Improvement of Disadvantaged People,” financed by MJF.

Research Objectives

- ❑ To assess the land rights situation in the remote *char* areas and to identify the bottlenecks that deprive landless *char* dwellers of their rights.
- ❑ To identify the role of government bodies in implementing the existing legislation concerning *Khas* land.
- ❑ To outline the identities, roles and attitudes of land grabbers and their relation to the legislation and its implementation.
- ❑ To give an overview of the living standards of the *char* dwellers, to suggest plans to improve their situation.

Research Scope

The motivation for this research is to unfold the aspects, individuals and groups that undermine the land rights of *char* dwellers. Secondly, it explores the longstanding ‘politics of space’ overplayed by different actors, particularly the ‘Bhumiheen Samity’ and ‘Krishak Federation’. It also incorporates the recommendations of a range of people including the local civil societies (CSs) to understand the problems of land rights, CS politics and associated human rights violations.

The research also provides a brief sketch of the standard of living of the char dwellers and its connections to different aspects of human rights. However, it does not focus on the details of standard of living as that would incorporate multidimensional issues that are beyond the scope of a single study.

Research methodology

The research methodology includes research area selection, quantitative and qualitative processes of data collection, and the selection of a unit of study in conducting this baseline survey.

Research Area Selection

The selected research areas met the following criteria: they were *chars* where Speed Trust currently works or intends to work shortly. The *chars* selected also had worse land rights situations and problems for the landless than other regions.

Data Collection Method

Both qualitative and quantitative techniques were applied to triangulate and validate data and thereby collect authentic information. Qualitative data collection involved interviews, discussions, and field visits with the following components:

Focus group discussions: These were carried out with *char* dwellers with the objective of acquiring information and feedback on their achievements and hurdles.

Document study: Documents related with the *chars* and their people were reviewed for the theoretical information required for appropriate field study.

Quantitative Survey: As the main objective of this research was to identify the reasons and actors responsible for depriving the *char* dwellers of their land rights, a questionnaire-based quantitative survey was conducted in ten *chars* of two upazilas in the district of Patuakhali. This was to illustrate the land rights situation in the *chars* and to create a benchmark for the *char* dwellers in claiming their rights through legal and government institutions. All of the households on these ten *chars* were surveyed. The research team conducted a census covering all households except those where the residents were not present.

Questionnaire based interviews: As a part of the quantitative survey, the team operated questionnaire-based interviews with 1,236 households in ten *chars*.

Unit of study

The unit of this baseline study is a household. Apart from information concerning respondents/ individuals, the study has been conducted with focus on the household.

Structure of the paper

The paper is divided into six parts. The first chapter introduces the objectives and methodological framework used in conducting this baseline study. The second chapter briefly describes the *chars* and

their salient features. The third chapter focuses on the rights issues of the *char* dwellers. The fourth chapter identifies the land grabbers and their associates, who are primarily responsible for undermining *khas* land rights. The fifth chapter presents the major findings of the study. The final chapter provides the recommendations and suggestions articulated by the study participants and the research team; it also includes a concluding remark concerning the *char* land rights situation.

Challenges

The first challenge of conducting this research was associated with doing fieldwork in the *chars*. Several members of the research team had no or little idea of the lifestyle on the *chars*; as a result, they experienced culture shock in response of several elements of *char* life. Time constraints were the other challenge the research team faced during the fieldwork.

In some households, the absence of an adult male meant that the interviews were conducted with female respondents. It was evident from the fieldwork that female respondents provided less information on land issues than male respondents.

The Chars at a Glance

The Salient Features of the Chars and their Residents

The two main types of *chars* found in Bangladesh are island *chars* and attached *chars*. Island *chars* are surrounded by water all year round; conversely, attached *chars* are connected to the mainland at normal water levels. All of the *chars* where the baseline survey was conducted were categorically island *chars*.

The history of the *chars* and human settlement are closely linked. Data collection revealed that the ages of these *chars* vary from 30 years to 50 years and, according to the respondents, the histories of *char* generation (the rising of *char* land from the river) and *char* settlement by humans are almost simultaneous. Even though the *chars* were relatively old, two *chars* of the ten were not part of any development interventions or initiatives from development organizations (NGOs). Where initiatives were active, participants informed the study that development organizations focused more on credit programs than on their overall rights.

Government operated land censuses were conducted on all *chars* apart from west Shahajjalal but these could not ensure land rights for the most of the *char* dwellers; instead, land had become one of the main sources of multidimensional vulnerability. The conditions of education access on these *chars* were very poor as well; there were very few government supported schools on most of the *chars*, and one did not have any institutions at all.

Physical setting

Apart from the *chars* of Baret and Basbaria in the Baufal Upazila, the remaining 8 *chars* were situated in Dashmina. All these *chars* were isolated from the mainland, with low physical connectivity and high vulnerability.

Remoteness

Cut off from the mainland, the distance from the island *chars* varies from 2 to 10 kilometres. The boat is the sole means of transport to the mainland. This physical isolation has had deep-rooted effects on the psyche of the *char* dwellers; the extreme sense of remoteness has evolved among them. Moreover, the mobility of the *char* dwellers depends largely on the ebb and flow of the water as most of the *char* are inundated during the high tide. Mobility is low on the *chars* themselves as well; none of these landmasses have clear paths, let alone brick roads. As a result, the movement for the *char* dwellers, especially the children, becomes very difficult for a significant part of the day. Another consequence of the poor communication, remoteness, diversified insecurity and poor infrastructures on these *chars* is the low quality of government services and education facilities. Healthcare is also underdeveloped; the *chars* do not have modern medical services and structures for the most part; only traditional healers. When medical emergencies arise, especially at night, patients and their families need to wait until daylight to make any progress or come to the mainland. Apart from *gram sarkar* representatives on several *chars* these regions have neither any local government institutional setups nor any local representatives.

Human habitation

The age of these *chars* varies from 30- 50 years. In spite the remoteness and insecurity of the *char* land, the timeline of human habitation is very close to the age of *char* generation. The push factors involved in creating human resettlement on *chars* largely involve river erosion and landlessness. Among the respondents, 39.82% and 30.81% had to move to these *chars* because of river erosion and landlessness respectively; they moved to find land to live and work on. 2.48% of the respondents took the option of settling in the *chars* to avoid poverty. As can be seen from figure 1, a significant number of households settled not for opportunistic reasons but for survival. However, a few households had alternative reasons for settling: 11.49% of respondents revealed that they were motivated to occupy the newly available khas land and 4.01% of the households came to make use of the cultivable land.

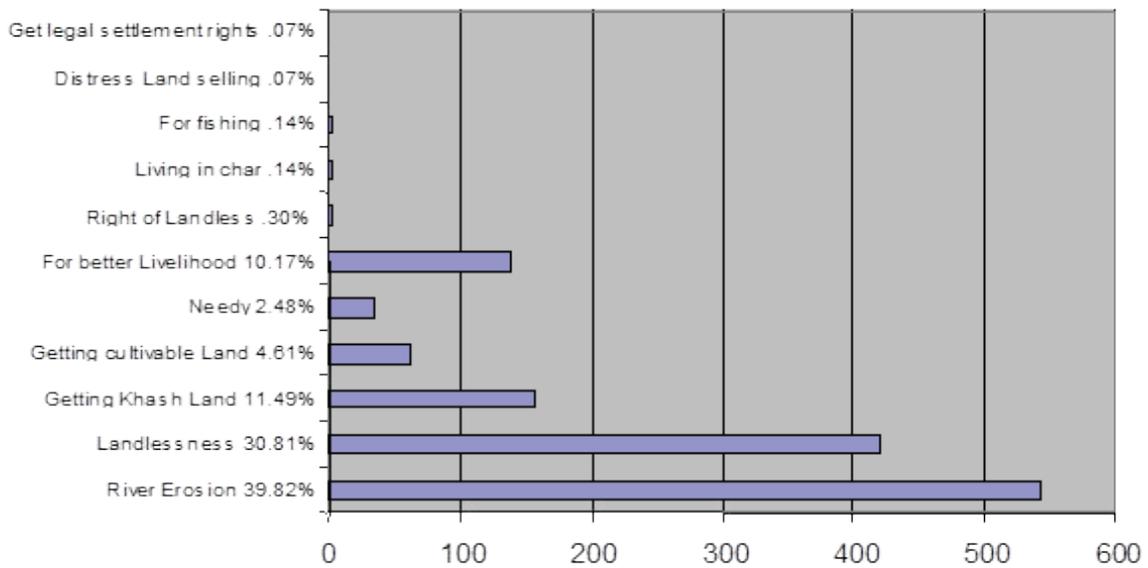


Figure 1: Reasons for Settling on Char Land

The Profile of Char Dwellers and their Rights Situation

Demographic Profile of Char Dwellers

According to the survey estimation, the total population of these 10 chars was 4099 from 939 households. 97% of the households were headed by males, while the remaining 3% had female heads. The number of female-headed household in these chars was far lower than the national average; the remoteness and adverse lifestyle on the chars seemed to be the primary factor for the shortage of female-headed households there.

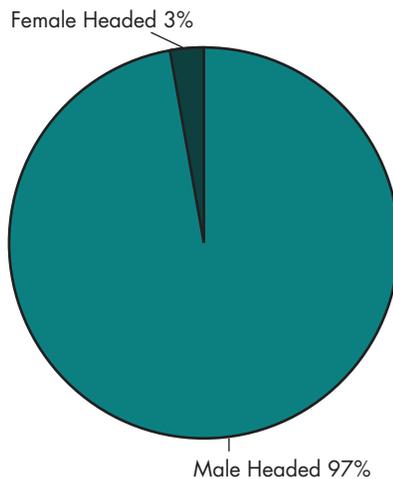


Figure 2: Household Heads

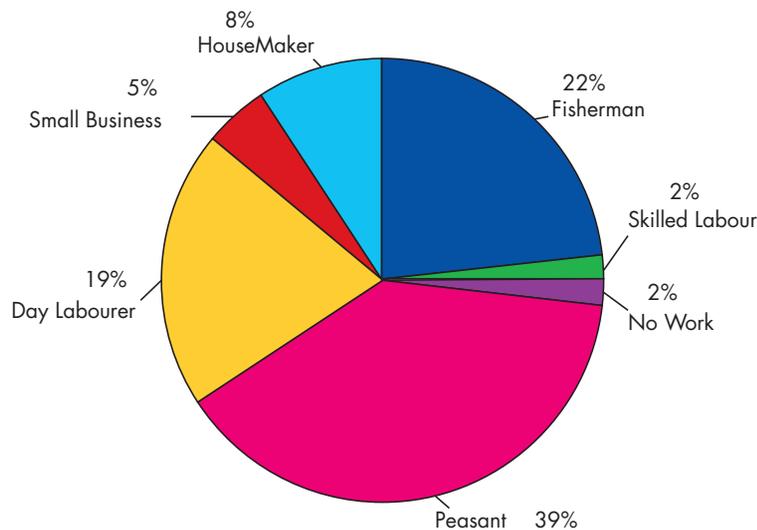


Figure 3: Occupations of Char Dwellers

Socio-economic Profile of Char Dwellers

The socio-economic profile covers different aspects of the social and economic life of the *char* dwellers such as their occupational and educational status, access to potable water and the existence and quality of sanitation arrangements.

Occupations

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of occupations among the survey respondents. Peasantry is the dominant occupation; 39% of the respondents are involved in peasantry for a living. Fishing is the second largest occupation at 22%. The third significant occupational group is unskilled labour; 19% are day labourers. The skilled labour group is the smallest of employed groups on the *chars*: only 2% of the respondents are involved in skilled work. Another 8% of the respondents, mostly women and the elderly, are homemakers.

For the purpose of this study, peasantry, fishing community and unskilled labour are being levelled as identical occupation groups in terms of occupational vulnerability and income levels. 80% of the respondents share these occupational groups.

Formal Education

Figure 4 summarises the status of formal education on these *chars*, revealing on the poor conditions of educational access. A large number of respondents, 42.52%, did not have any formal education, showing that almost half of the *char* population is deprived of education entirely. The second largest group of 37.98% of the respondents could only sign their names; they could not read or write. 15.24% respondents had primary education, while only 4.08% were educated up to high school. The remaining levels of education had an insignificant number of representatives.

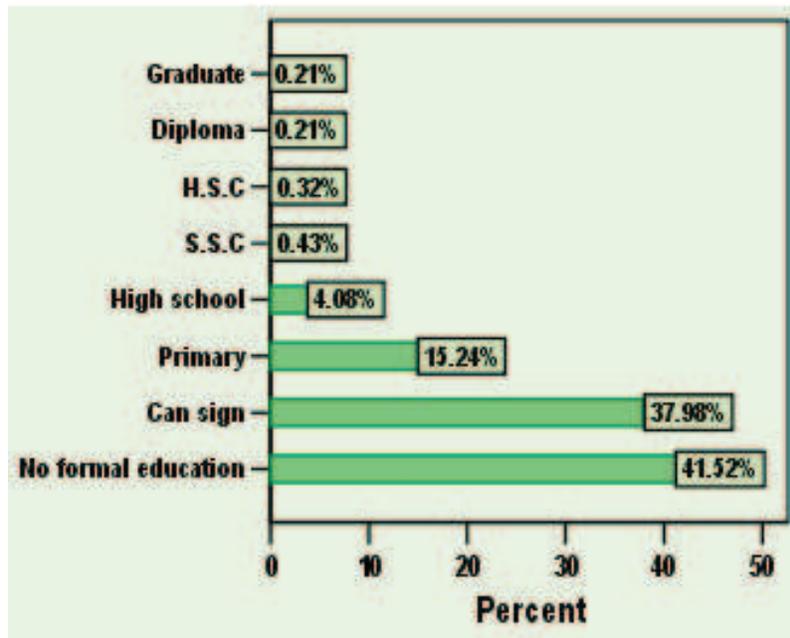


Figure 4: Status of Formal Education

Crisis of Safe Potable Water

The crisis of safe potable water was acute on all of the *chars* studied. Many *char* dwellers were compelled drink water from river, lake or pond sources; in particular, the residents of the Baret and Basudevpassa *chars*, Boufal, had no alternatives to untreated, unhygienic water. A consequence is the prevalence of water-borne diseases such cholera and diarrhoea in *char* settlements.

Sanitation Status

The survey concentrated on the availability of latrines to understand the sanitation arrangements on the *chars*. The findings were quite positive since 74% of the households did possess latrines in spite of the generally low living standards and conditions of poverty. However, 26% of the homes did not have any sort of latrine provisions.

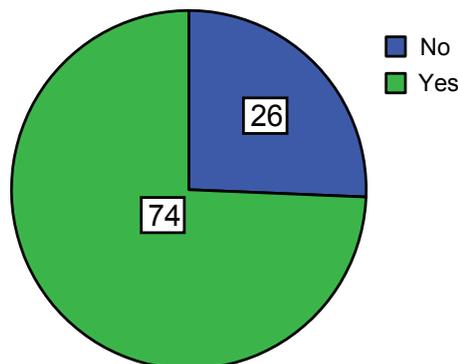


Figure 5: Sanitation Provisions

Land rights

Even though most of the households interviewed have been living on these *chars* for one to two decades, a significant number of them are far from achieving their land rights. Instead, the landless *char* dwellers are in a constant state of flux since their lack of entitlement to the land is responsible for asset erosion and vulnerability, and the implications of not securing their rights has financial and psychological repercussions for the *char* dwellers. The research shows an objective landscape of the land rights situation on these *chars*. 60.63% of the households did not possess legal documents; only a 39.37% could provide paperwork (Figure 6).

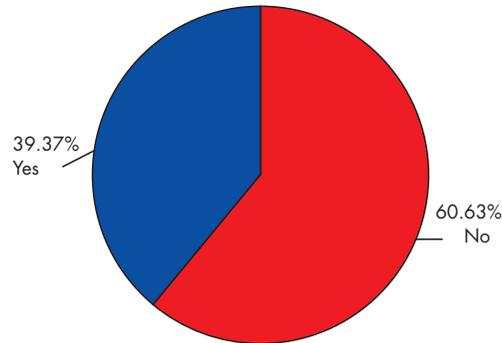


Figure 6: Ownership of Homestead Land

Possession of Legal Documents

Char land falls into 2 categories: homestead land and agricultural land. It should be noted that both agricultural land and homestead land are embedded in legal land documents. On top of that, government regulations make two types of legal provisions for land ownership: on a temporary basis or a permanent basis. is mainly categorised as homestead land and agriculture land. According to the data, the ownership status of agriculture land is primarily on a temporary basis. Among the households who possess legal documents of agriculture land, 75.8% have temporary ownership. Only 24.2% of the households with legal documentation possess their land permanently.

The status of homestead land in terms of ownership status is similar to that of agricultural land. 79.4% of the households with documentation possess temporary documents and 29.6% households have permanent documents (Figures 7a and 7b).

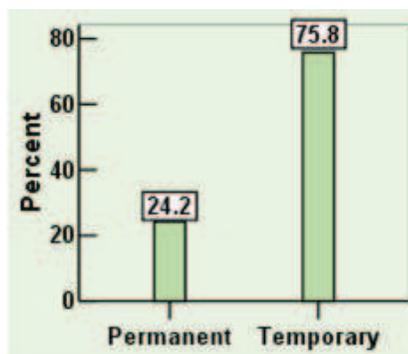


Figure 7a: Ownership of agricultural land

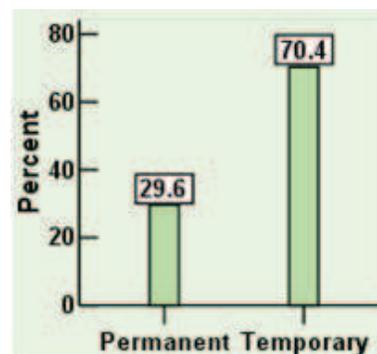


Figure 7b: Ownership of homestead land

The other dimension of land rights is related to the type of cultivation that takes place on agricultural land. The study suggests that there are four main conditions of cultivating land in the *chars*. Land occupancy cultivation is the dominant type, with 67.6% of the households cultivating their land based on occupancy rights. 27.2 % of households cultivate the land based on settlement (one-year DCR and permanent). The other options of Zaighir and sharecropping are taken up by 1.2% and 1.6% of households respectively (Figure 8).

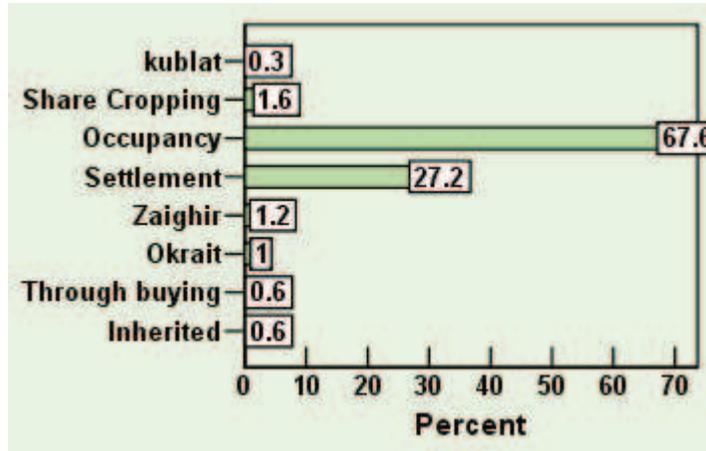


Figure 8: Conditions of Land Cultivation

One of the conflicts occurs even with land rights secured through occupancy is that the land settlement office provides one-year DCR settlement rights to other places, as a means of manipulating poor *char* dwellers with limited knowledge of the system. This makes them vulnerable to frequent attacks and harassment from terrorists or land grabbers. The involvement of influential actors such as political leaders in the corruption of this system means that the complaints of the *char* dwellers in this regard often go ignored.

Fundamental Rights Situation

This study revealed that the *char* residents are being deprived of basic rights to education, healthcare and potable water. The Baret *char* in particular proved to be the most deprived in terms of infrastructure, education and health services; there were 300-500 children of school age living there without a school to attend and the one satellite school that was available has been closed since 2002. Local administration, with the exception of gram sarkar representatives, is absent from these *chars* since there are no figures from the union parishad involved. As a result, vulnerable groups such as old people, abandoned widows, divorcees and separated women do not receive the pensions and compensations that they are due.

Land Grabbers: One of the Most Dominant Actors for Char Dwellers

Unmasking the Land-grabbers

The common situation on most of the *chars* is that landless *char* dwellers are deprived of their rights even though they are entitled to the *char khas* land on both humanitarian and legal grounds: the Khas Land Ordinance 1997 suggests that *khas* land be allocated among landless people and that they get highest priority in ownership. Unfortunately, the reality is that the more powerful groups and their companions, mostly from the privileged classes, grab *char* land thus denying the occupants of most of these regions their rights.

A crucial step in understanding and enforcing land rights on the *chars* is to identify the land-grabbers, which is why one of the main objectives of this research is to unmask them. More than 200 names were articulated by the *char* dwellers as land grabbers: among them Abdur Rari , Abul Kalam Member, Abul Kalam Mirdha, Azhar Bepari, Belayed Sikdar, Joynal Akand, Moslema Akther and Moslem Kha were mentioned frequently. One of the most regularly mentioned land-grabbers was Abdur Rari, who is significant for his role as president of the Vumiheen Samity, the organization responsible for helping the landless poor establish their land rights, especially on the *chars*. As can be seen, these land grabbers are often from the rich and powerful segments of the society. More than half of them are influential peasants; others land grabbers have been identified as teachers, lawyers, journalists, businessmen and even students.

Related observations made during the study were that land-grabbers prepared documents not only in their names but also in the names of household members. Land-grabbing activities were also almost exclusively conducted by males; very few women were mentioned as land-grabbers (Figure 9). The individuals who were identified as land grabbers by the *char* dwellers included political leaders, teachers, local representatives and even the members and leaders of significant organisations that are supposed to ensure the rights of the landless, such as the Krishak Federation and the *Bhumiheen* Samity, as mentioned earlier.

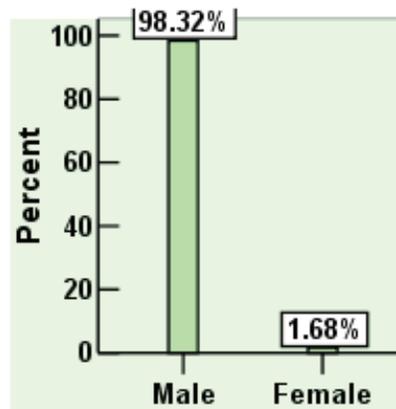


Figure 9: Gender Distribution of Land-grabbers

Another significant feature of these land grabbers is that more than 80% of them reside on the mainland even though they own large chunks of *char* land. Fewer than 10% of them actually live on the *chars* or process the land (Figure 10).

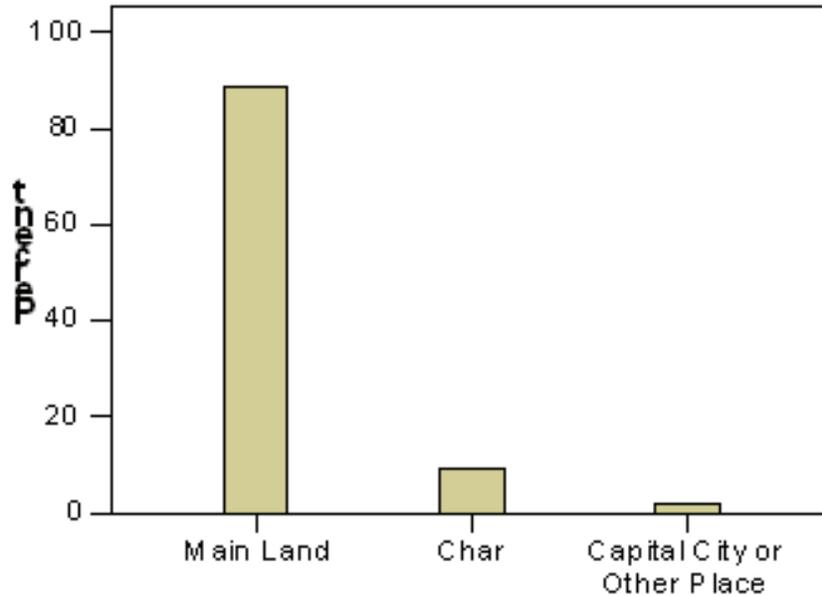


Figure 10: Residences of Identified Land-grabbers.

The actions of the land grabbers are highly criticised by the *char* dwellers. 71% of the *char* dwellers interviewed asserted that land grabbers were responsible for increasing their poverty. On the other hand, 29% of the respondents expressed the opposite opinion.

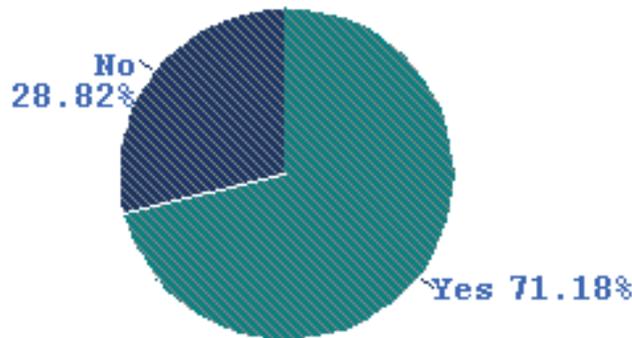


Figure 11: Are Land-grabbers Responsible for Increasing Poverty?

How Land-grabbers Increase Poverty

The respondents also identified the means by which land-grabbers attacked them and increased poverty. 27% identified snatching harvested crops as the main form of harassment. 21% of the respondents stated forceful subscription as an issue; a further 21% said that filing cases against *char* dwellers was another way of violating their rights. 10% of the respondents cited land occupation by the land-grabbers as a way of increasing poverty.

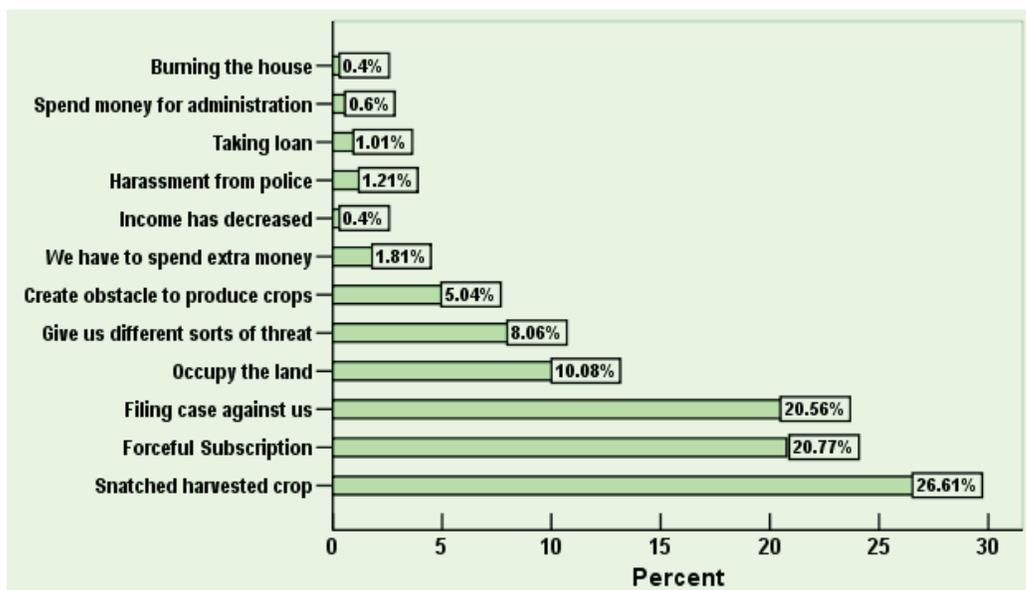


Figure 12: Land-grabbers' Methods to Increase Poverty on Chars

The Power Sources of the Land-grabbers

The study respondents identified the following sources of land-grabbers' power and manipulation (Figure 13), as well as the characteristics that they demonstrated in seizing *char* resources:

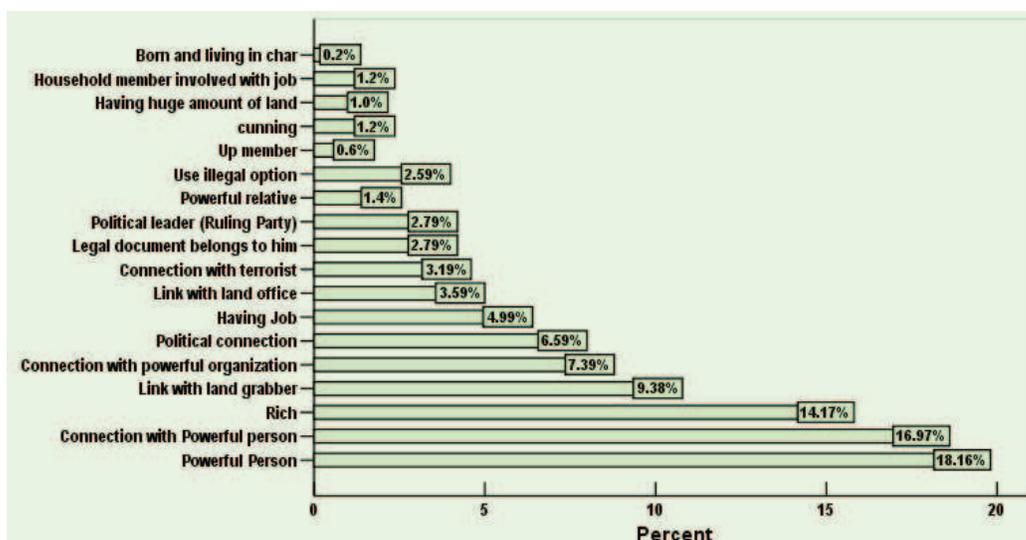


Figure 13: Power Sources and Manipulation Characteristics of Char Land-grabbers

It was interesting to note that even though the land-grabbers are a major presence and source of misery in the lives of landless *char* dwellers, about 17% of the respondents were almost unaware of the information about their sources of power. Of the 83% who did have answers, more than 60% opined that the rich and powerful actors and their associates—sometimes landless people themselves—used different techniques to undermine the rights of the landless poor.

Filing Cases, an Obstacle in Establishing Land Rights

One of the most prevalent and difficult obstacles to establishing land rights for the landless *char* dwellers is the filing of cases against them by land-grabbers. 20% of the respondents admitted that they were embroiled in the vicious cycle of land-related cases.

A Nexus of Multifaceted Actors

As is apparent from the findings of this study, the land rights situation in the *chars* is grave and precarious. A nexus of different actors and associations with their own interests in mind is the principal reason that the landless *char* dwellers have been unable to achieve the khas land entitled to them. The involvement of these actors, especially the powerful ones, in the issue of land rights hardly helps the landless people; rather, it jeopardises their security. That is why it is important to understand how these players determine and control the land rights on the *chars*.

In terms of ensuring land rights, the land administration is the highest authority; however the landless poor have little or no access to them. There is a conflict of interests between the *char* dwellers and interest groups such as the Vumiheen Samity and Krishak Federation whose members and leaders prefer to work toward their own ends. In addition, the long-standing difficulties between these two organisations, particularly in the Dashmina Upazila, has caused cases and counter cases to be filed, further obstructing justice and the people's rights. The Baret and Basudevpassa *chars* do not even have an acting Krishak Federation. On top of these issues, the forestry department also occupies 7679 acres of *char* land illegally. This entire network of settlement manipulation is presided over by the pressure of political actors, the interests of land brokers and the corruption and inactiveness of government administration.

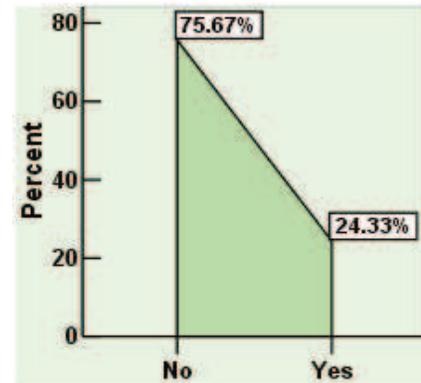


Figure 14: People Involved in Land-related Cases

The Long-Standing Vulnerability of Char Dwellers and Its Consequences

Politics of Space

The concerns of land-grabbers and parties in power are limited to how much land they can acquire. They pay little attention to solving land disputes and allocating the *chars* for better use. Even though organizations like the *Bhumiheen* Samity and Krishak Federation are expected to play a positive role in *char* dwellers' lives, it is apparent that they, along with local representatives, political leaders and other influential parties in the community, place self-interest over the needs of the landless poor.

The long-standing conflict between parties is another reason that *char* dwellers are divided and far from achieving stability. In the Doshmina *chars*, for example, the *char* dwellers are divided into opposing groups that favour either the *Bhumiheen* Samity or the Krishak Federation. In Baret and Basudevpassa, there is no active presence of the Krishak Federation. The feud between the landless Krishak federation members of the *char* and the landless of the mainland has lasted for over two decades.

Both the *Bhumiheen* Samity and the Krishak Federation are supposed to negotiate land issues on the behalf of the landless *char* dwellers; however, multiple factors and the interests of individual members inclines these organisations toward the land-grabbers instead.

Insecurity during the Harvest Season

During the harvesting period, insecurity and instability on the *chars* reaches its highest point. Agriculture on the *chars* is the principal cause of disputes and cases filed; many respondents claimed that they could not enjoy the yield of their crops since land-grabbing parties or their goons would seize the produce as soon as harvesting begins. However, there were a few positive instances where *char* dwellers would get assistance from development organisations in sharing the harvest among themselves and resisting land-grabbers' interference.

Helplessness of the Char Dwellers

The *char* dwellers' helplessness is the result of a plethora of factors, from their isolation and risk of natural disasters to the symbolic and physical violence caused by land-grabbing and parties in power. Of the respondents, 91.50% were in fear of harassment by influential parties.

Another reason for their helplessness is their inability to take action against the injustices of the land-grabbers. Only 17% of the respondents had been able to file cases against them; the remaining 82.13% had not been able to take any action.

Figure 15 shows the many reasons that prevent the *char* dwellers from defending themselves. 40.89% of the household identified poverty as their main reason for failure; 17.13% identified their powerlessness as an obstacle to taking positive action.

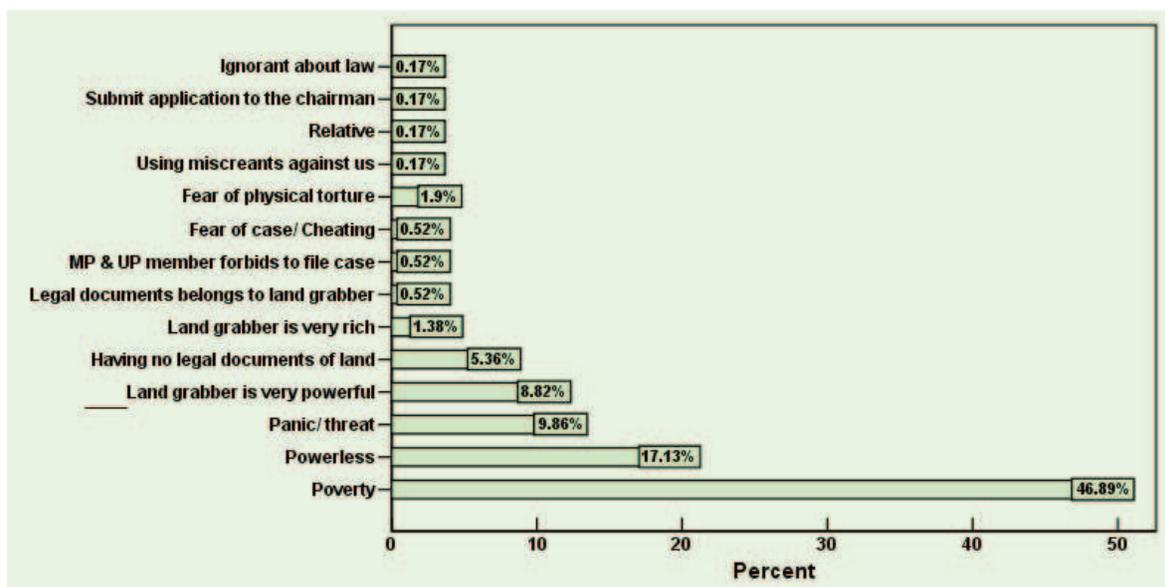


Figure 16: Reasons that Char Dwellers do not take Action

Ultimately, the lack of help from the land authorities and the absence of fruitful results of their attempts to secure land rights all contribute toward a general sense of powerlessness in *char* communities.

Reasons for Unhappiness

Numerous reasons (Figure 16) for unhappiness exist among *char* households, with need and landlessness being cited as the two most prominent problems. Being terrorised and harassed is also a significant issue on the *chars*.

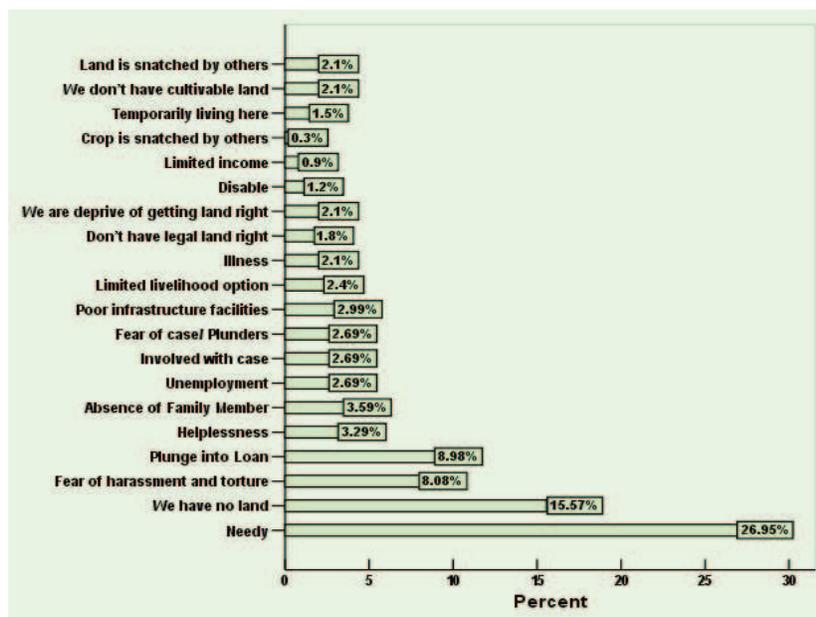


Figure 16: Reasons for unhappiness

The deprivation of basic rights and amenities for generations of *char* dwellers also causes great difficulty. Moreover, the fierce competition for land often instigates incidents of rape, arson, and appropriation of harvest crops all of which negatively impact the people's homes and lives.

The Perception of Happiness and Dominance of Fatalistic Views

In spite of this variety of problems in the lives of the *char* dwellers, it is interesting to note that 59.13% of the *char* dwellers identified themselves as 'happy' — greater than the 40.87% that said they were not happy with their lives. One reason for this was the fact that most maintained a fatalistic view of life, preferring to accept the will of Allah/ the Creator to providing specific reasons. A more detailed breakdown for the response towards happiness is provided in Figure 17.

The proportion of 'happy' and 'unhappy' households makes more sense in the light of this analysis. While 63% of the respondents cited a fatalistic outlook, that they were 'happy with the way Allah kept them' they did not necessarily provide specific reasons for actually feeling happy with their conditions. A further 14% claimed moderate satisfaction i.e. they were neither happy nor unhappy. Very few respondents asserted that they were actually living in peace or had livelihood options to keep them satisfied.

The *chars* provide many reasons for unhappiness and few reasons against it. Apart from a fatalistic acceptance of their circumstances, the *char* dwellers seem to have little cause to be at peace with their lives. On the other hand, very concrete issues like need, land constraints, loans and debts, the lack of earning members and rights deprivation continue to contribute to the problems of *char* households.

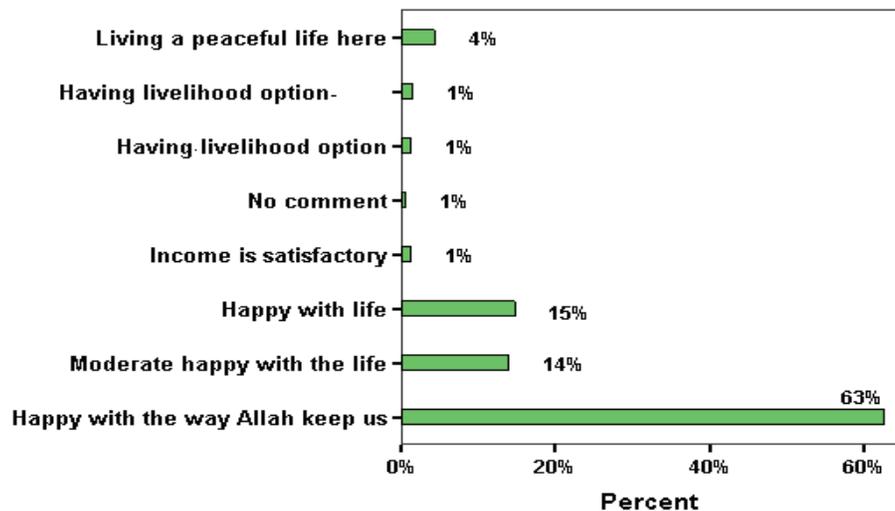


Figure 17: Responses to Happiness

Recommendations and Concluding Remarks

Outline

As can be seen from this study, *char* dwellers suffer through extreme insecurity, unemployment during lean periods, lack of education and medical services, psychological vulnerability and land rights deprivation. The following recommendations to improve quality of life have been suggested in the various FDGs and personal interviews conducted with government representatives, local civil society officials and *char* dwellers themselves. Suggestions from the research team are also provided.

Recommendations from *char* dwellers and local civil societies

Making different policies for chars

The life and landscape on the *chars* are very different from that on the mainland; it follows that policy devised for the mainland will not apply to *char* communities. For example, maintaining households on the *chars* is a struggle and establishing schools are even more so; thus the mainstream policies used by government education officers would be ineffective. More flexible policies are required to implement educational access. Security issues are also rampant on the *chars*, especially during the harvest seasons; crops are snatched miscreants and powerful parties from the mainland or other places. FDG respondents on the *chars* have demanded that police camps be established throughout the harvest season to counter this trouble. In addition, vulnerable populations like female-headed households and the elderly are often excluded from government support because of the lack of local representatives, except for the *gram sarkar* officials in some cases. Existing policies do not address *char* issues effectively, that is why many interviewees have suggested making separate new policies to solve these problems.

Conducting a new land census

Land censuses have been conducted on all of the *chars* studies except for the Shahjalal *char*. However this has not ensured land rights for most of the *char* dwellers. Most of the FDG respondents recommend a new land census to properly allocate land among the landless residents.

Providing full stipends and scholarships for the students from Chars

One of the major reasons for lack of education among *char* children is the financial constraints and insecurities of their families. To encourage education, the FDG participants recommend full scholarships for both boys and girls.

Building dams to counter erosion

The *char* dwellers of Hadi face river erosion as one of their persistent hazards. The FDG participants have suggested building dams around the *char* to ensure the safety of the people and to allow the land to be utilised.

Initiating poultry farms on the chars

Unemployment is a common feature of *char* life, particularly during lean periods. Establishing poultry and duck farms on the *chars* with the financial assistance of NGOs can help reduce economic vulnerability, according to FGD results.

Distributing land occupied by land-grabbers among the landless

Both *char* dwellers and local civil society representatives have advocate redistributing the *char* land occupied by the land grabbers. The local civil society officials' responses in the FGDs have been that government initiatives will be required to achieve this.

Recommendations from the Research Team

Introducing the char land rights issues to public awareness

The difficulties and crises faced by *char* communities become even worse in the absence of their land rights. The multifaceted implications of land rights deprivation include high economic costs, physical and psychological threats, high debt and other issues; yet *char* dwellers continue to be set back in their efforts for their rights. That is why it is necessary to raise awareness of this to a variety of people. One of the considerations for this survey was in fact alerting the public to the struggles of *char* communities

Reviewing of development initiatives on chars

Different development organizations have been working on the *chars*, with the exceptions of South Bashbaria and North Shahjalal. However, these organizations need to critically evaluate their work in order to be effective. One question to be asked is why certain *chars* are still excluded from there intervention; a second is whether or not their measures truly help the landless *char* dwellers to enforce their rights. Establishing legal rights on their land is very crucial for the *char* dwellers since land is closely tied to their means of livelihood and survival; it is imperative that development organisations review their work to make sure that they are indeed helping in this regard.

Concluding Remarks

The land rights situation on the *chars* is of great concern as the entire land settlement process goes against the landless poor. Even though the 1997 reformed law concerning khas land is in favour of the landless *char* dwellers, weak implementation processes have not been able to ensure their security. On top of this, the nexus of land grabbers and corrupted government administration pushes the poor *char* dwellers toward further marginalisation and crisis. Only a combined effort of the parts of the civil societies, government and the *char* dwellers themselves will help counter these problems of rights deprivation. What *char* communities need are not blame games and vicious cycles, but a cohesive plan of action, irrespective of gender and religion, that incorporates public awareness and an understanding of their needs by all parties involved.

WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ALONG THE COASTAL BELT OF BANGLADESH



WATER RESOURCE MANAGEMENT ALONG THE COASTAL BELT OF BANGLADESH

Md. Abdur Razzak Khalifa, Chairman

Md. Mizanur Rahman, Executive Director, Ulania Social Welfare Society (USWS)

Abstract

Bangladesh is a country of rivers and a large part of it is bound by the coastal belts of Patuakhali, Kuakata, Mongla, Barguna, Patharghata, Taltoli, Satkhira, Khulna, Cox's Bazaar, Chittagong, Feni, Bhola, Bagerhat, Pirojpur, Gopalganj, Barisal, Jhalakathi, and Laxmipur. The coastal region covers almost 29,000 km² or about 20% of the country with more than 30% of cultivable land. However, about 53% of these coastal areas are affected by salinity. As a result, agricultural land use is very poor— much lower than country's average cropping intensity. Salinity creates an unfavorable environment with hydrological conditions that restrict normal crop production throughout the year.

The dominant crop grown in the coastal regions is the local transplanted low-yield Aman rice. The cropping patterns followed are mainly two fallow seasons followed by planting of the rice. The agriculture here faces a number of problems including salinity intrusion due to reduction of the freshwater flow from upstream, salinization of groundwater and fluctuation of soil salinity. Cyclones and tidal surges add to these problems; tidal surges bring saline water into the polders in the coastal area. Drainage congestion causes these places to remain waterlogged, thus impeding land productivity and food security. Since agriculture is a major sector of not just the national economy but also of the economy of the coastal regions, salinity intrusions are bound to have serious negative impacts on output. The varieties of rice being cultivated at present may not be able to withstand the increased salinity or produce their optimum yield. Climate change is another related threat to food production in Bangladesh. According to the IPCC report 2007, rice production in Bangladesh may fall by 10%, and wheat by 30%, by 2050 (Climate Change in Asia 'Too Alarming to Contemplate'-report, IPCC, 2007).

Block demonstrations provide an effective way of combating the effects of climate change and developing climate resilient agriculture. The average yield of local rice is about 2.4 t/ha, while the yield of improved high yielding varieties (HYV) of rice (inbred and hybrid) is generally 2 to 3 times higher. This is mostly due to the more effective use of the land, with more tillers per hill, thus, more plants per unit area. The high-yielding varieties also have longer panicles and more filled grains per panicle, all of which produces greater output. The yield of hybrid rice is 1-2 t/ha higher than that of HYV rice, and about 3-4 t/ha higher than the traditional rice varieties cultivated by farmers.

Large-scale shifts from local rice cultivation to hybrid rice cultivation also affect output. Several new crops, with greater cultivation intensity, have been introduced in recent years; and improvements in the new varieties of rice has increased average yield. For example, the hybrid paddy strain Alloran has brought about a 250% increase in yield, in comparison to local varieties such as Godaila and Moinamati. Hybrid and HYV crops that are suitable for plain land as well as select coastal areas may

change cropping patterns, cropped areas, intensity, yield, production, and income. This can help increase the resilience of coastal farming communities in combating the dangers of climate change.

As a case for the cultivation of hybrid or HYV rice, there are some areas in the Barisal division where three rice crops can be cultivated per year, utilizing both rainfall and river water. With an investment of about BDT 120,000 per ha per year, it is possible for farmers to harvest up to 18.0 t/ha annually, earning returns of about BDT 316,000 per ha. Even in areas, where sufficient water is not available for boro rice cultivation, farmers use alternatives such as cultivating rabi crops in a rotational aus-aman-rabi pattern, since rabi crops demand less water and can tap residual soil moisture better for their growth and development. The farmers of Kachua, Barguna Sadar, Jhalokathi Sadar, Patuakhali Sadar and Nazirpur upazilas have harvested 12 to 18 t/ha by adopting (a) Rice-Rice-Maize, (b) Rice-Rice-Sunflower and (c) Rice-Rice-Mungbean rotational patterns in the Aus, Aman and Rabi seasons. Water resources in these upazilas allow three-crop cultivation (two rice and a rabi crop). By investing around BDT 94,600-116,700 per ha in a year, farmers can make an annual income of BDT 249,700-324,800 per ha.

In an overpopulated country like Bangladesh, it is particularly vital to promote the cultivation of hybrid rice, especially in the water-sensitive coastal regions. In the face of climate change hazards and risks to agriculture, the production of high-yielding or resistant varieties of rice can utilize the available land more effectively, and help improve food security. Water-scarce areas along the Bangladesh coast could also grow alternative crops, such as maize, in the rabi seasons for higher productivity and income. Sunflowers are another example of crops that can be grown in the rabi season since they can add to farmers' incomes and be a source for edible oil, thus saving foreign currency by reducing the import of edible oil.

Measures to increase cropping intensity and the resilience of the coastal farming communities along the salinity-affected areas of Bangladesh include both water conservation and appropriate cultivation strategies. First, fresh/non-saline river water should be conserved in the polder canals to irrigate boro/rabi crops. Second, single and double crop areas could be converted to double or triple crop areas by introducing short-duration, high-yielding resistant crop varieties that can use residual soil moisture, non-saline river water and conserved fresh water from the canals inside the polders. Third, block demonstrations should be used to disseminate appropriate climate resilient technologies that can achieve food security in coastal communities.

Keywords: Coastal Communities, Agricultural land, Coastal Farming, Crops, High Yielding, Tidal Flood, Salinity, Cropping Patterns, Climate Change, Food Security, Crop Intensity.

Background and Cultivation Potential of the Coastal Regions

Bangladesh is located between the 20°34' to 26°38' North latitudes and the 88°01' to 92°42' East longitudes. It is bordered to the west, north and east by India, to the south-east by Myanmar and to the south by the Bay of Bengal. The country occupies an area of 147,570 sq. km (BBS, 2005). The south-western coastal areas are sometimes inundated by high tidal surges. To counter this, there are numerous pockets along the southern coast that are deliberately freed from 'normal tidal' flooding. Peripheral areas outside the embankments are also prone to tidal inundation. Sometimes excessive rainwater accumulates inside an embankment, and the lack of adequate drainage facilities, particularly

in the low-lying pockets, causes these embankments to suffer from floods caused by drainage congestion.

People living in the different coastal areas of Bangladesh frequently suffer from lack of food security. A variety of factors affect food availability such as lower crop productivity, lower cropping intensity due to increased salinity, increased incidences of pests & disease, erratic rainfall, higher temperatures, drought, tidal surges, cyclones, submergence, the waste of large fallow lands/water bodies, land degradation, poor road networks, poor marketing facilities and unemployment. Long-term cumulative effects include soil-related constraints, climate risks and socio-economic problems. A recent study by The SAARC Meteorological Research Council (SMRC, 2010) revealed that there will be a 13% (469,000 ha) increase in the area inundated during monsoon if there is a 62 cm rise in sea levels due to increased emissions and temperature. The regions most vulnerable to this are the areas without polders, such as Patuakhali, Pirojpur, Barisal, Jhalakati, Bagerhat and Narail. Increased rainfall will add to the 62-cm sea level rise, bringing the inundated area to another 16% (551,500 ha) of the country by the year 2080.

On top of climate risks, the lack of employment opportunities around the year aggravates the food security situation and is a matter of great concern for policy makers. Since the majority of the people living in coastal areas are involved in crop cultivation and fishing, they are frequently unemployed due to tidal flooding and other natural disasters that further affect food security.

More than 30% of the cultivable land in Bangladesh is along the coast, of which 1.0 million ha is severely affected each year by varying degrees of salinity during the dry season and flooding/submergence during the wet season. Traditionally, farmers cultivate rice in the Aman season, using multiple cropping techniques to ensure food sufficiency. Low-yielding traditional rice varieties are grown only during the monsoon (Aman) season, from July to December. Most of these lands remain fallow in the dry (Rabi/Boro) and pre-monsoon (Aus) seasons because of perceived high soil and water salinity and the lack of good quality irrigation water (Karim et al., 1990, Mondal et al., 2004a). While farmers of the other parts of Bangladesh benefit from higher farm productivity and are to some extent able to cover their losses from relatively secure high yields of Boro rice, about 1.6 million farming families in the coastal saline areas of Bangladesh have very limited options as they continue to farm with geographical and agricultural constraints. Crop yields, cropping intensity, production levels and the quality of livelihood are much lower in this region than in other parts of the country (BBS, 2009).

The productivity of Aman rice is particularly low in most of these coastal areas because of excessive flooding (either partial or complete) and resistance to growing suitable high yielding varieties (HYV) of rice. Farmers rely on traditional rice varieties that are tall, do not respond to input and have low yields of 2-2.5 t/ha (Mondal et al., 2004a); they are reluctant to use HYVs because many are short, easily submerged and more prone to damage by tidal fluctuations. However, this can be countered by managing the excess water, which could easily be drained out during the low tide with the sluice gates of the coastal polders constructed by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). Unfortunately, many of the sluices do not function properly and farmers do not know how to operate them. Were this to

be implemented, however, the drainage in the monsoon season would help in the cultivation of HYV Aman rice and in the early establishment of rabi crops. Improving Aman rice yields, enabling crop intensification by adding either an Aus or a suitable non-rice crop before or a Boro rice or a non-rice crop after the Aman rice season can raise productivity, farmers' income, and livelihoods (Mondal et al., 2004a).

The coastal region of Bangladesh is deprived of technological advancements in agriculture. Only very few agricultural technologies are suitable to be adopted directly by the coastal saline areas of Bangladesh. As such, these areas urgently need a "systems approach" that will make use of modern agricultural technologies rather than seasonal or crop-specific approaches to particular soil and micro-climatic conditions. There are also some high value crops that could be grown through improved management practices. Through crop intensification and diversification, it is possible to maintain and significantly increase food security and farm income in the coastal areas.

The many tidal rivers and canals along the Bangladesh coast vary in their salinity from region to region. In Barisal, the water is useable for crop production for about 10 months; in Khulna region, the river water remains saline from February to June. However, there are opportunities for growing three crops per year in Barisal by utilizing rainfall, river and canal water resources, and for growing a rabi crop in Khulna after the Aman harvest by utilizing residual soil moisture and rainfall.

Since, the coastal region is prone to natural disasters, greater investments are needed to prevent and/or mitigate the impact of future disasters by mainstreaming DRR into longer-term sustainable development, protecting the built elements such as the agricultural or food supply-chain (food storage, processing, transport) infrastructures. These communities also need sustainable models of food production that apply technologies and practices adapted to local conditions to raise yields and reduce risks of production failure. First, better management of crop varieties, the adoption of crops that are more resilient to salinity, submergence/floods or drought, and adapted to new climate patterns; plant breeding to develop new adaptive and productive varieties, and the development of efficient seed-delivery systems for improving farmers' access to adequate varieties will provide options to increase food production. Secondly, sustainable water management can increase water use efficiency and productivity, through rainwater harvesting, river-water storage and conservation techniques and irrigation efficiency. Agro-forestry systems that make use of trees and shrubs as shelterbelts, windbreaks and live fences will diminish the effects of extreme weather events; conservation agriculture which uses minimal soil disturbance, permanent soil cover and crop rotations, will further contribute to crop diversification and high water infiltration for reduced surface runoff and soil erosion.

This project will focus on coastal saline areas that have already been affected by different levels of salinity and flooding under the present conditions, and that have been deemed the most vulnerable in terms of the direct and indirect impacts (e.g. sea level rise) of climate change. Even with these threats, there is potential to improve the productivity of rice and other major crops in the coastal saline areas. Technological solutions in agriculture include the development of innovative farming systems that will reduce risks and allow farmers to adapt to the uncertainty associated with climate change. Technology

may include the development and use of more flood, drought and salinity-tolerant crops and varieties, improved agronomic management packages, water harvesting and water management, soil fertility management and watershed management. Since few existing technologies are appropriate for the coastal saline areas, the project will validate new technologies using a 'systems approach' rather than season or crop-specific approaches that have been followed in the past. There is also potential to increase the value of farm output through intensification and increasing the production of higher value crops.

River water was directly used for irrigation up to the middle of February. Before it became too saline, the river water was taken in through sluices in the first week of February and conserved in on-farm canal networks of the coastal polders. The stored water was used to irrigate rice from mid-February to the end of March using low lift pumps (LLP). This allowed additional Boro rice to be cultivated successfully after the usual Aman harvest, utilizing available non-saline coastal water resources in spite of the naturally saline conditions. However, the limited volume of the reservoir canal meant that only a small area could be used for the Boro rice. It was estimated that about 15 to 30% of the cultivable land could be brought under Boro rice cultivation in the coastal polders using this approach.

BRRRI has recently developed salt-tolerant HYV rice for cultivation in the Boro season, which may extend the period and scope for river water utilization, increasing rice area and productivity of the coastal ricelands even in the dry periods. The salinity dynamics of the river water are more favourable in the south-central region than in the south-west part of Bangladesh, however, both the regions are vulnerable to natural disasters (eg. cyclone Sidr that hits the coastal regions of Bangladesh in November 2007 and Aila in May 2009 demolished the livelihoods of people there). Therefore, the adoption of appropriate water management technique(s) and the salt-tolerant rice variety will be sure to increase the cropped area and productivity there..

Since the availability of fresh water is the most significant limiting factor for crop intensification in the coastal regions of Bangladesh, the introduction of suitable non-rice crops is of utmost importance for increasing productivity and farm income. Non-rice (Rabi) crops can be grown by utilizing residual soil moisture left after the monsoon. Where feasible, suitable non-rice crop(s) should be introduced either as a sole or relay crop for further crop intensification. Non-rice crops can also be established by ploughing lands after the harvest of Aman rice. Research results showed that ploughing down the lands after the harvest of Aman rice conserved soil moisture and reduced topsoil salinity. These approaches may help farmers in establishing non-rice crops in the coastal saline soil under rain-fed environments. For further conservation of soil moisture, the farmers' can be encouraged to use straw mulching for the successful cultivation of non-rice crops.

Most soils in the southwest coastal region are heavy in texture so the drainage of excess rainfall is necessary for the successful production of non-rice crops in this region. The farmers should be motivated to adopt appropriate drain spacing where necessary for cultivation in heavy-textured soils. Non-rice crops like Maize, Pulses, and Sesame can be cultivated in the pre-monsoon season as well, by utilizing residual soil moisture and by adopting the appropriate drainage facilities. Thus Aus-Aman,

Aus-Aman-Rabi, Aman-Boro and Boro-Aus cropping patterns may be developed for different locations of the coastal regions of Bangladesh. Adoption of any of the above cropping pattern(s) in the coastal regions can increase food availability and farm income by at least two to three times than the usual practices. This will also reduce farmers' vulnerability in terms of coping with price hikes, climate change and the consequent natural hazards.

The lack of fresh water in the dry seasons will require the judicious utilization of rainfall to implement improved cropping patterns. Cultivating short-duration Vietnamese rice varieties (performed well in coastal districts) in the Aus season, followed by photoperiod insensitive rice varieties/advanced lines developed by BIRRI and IRRI, will develop a feasible Aus-Aman cropping pattern. Growing short-duration Aus rice from mid-May to August, either by direct seeding or by transplanting, is another way of utilizing rainfall. After that, transplanted HYV Aman rice grown from September to December will utilize both rainfall and river water (river water salinity remains <1 dS/m, suitable for irrigation). If participatory farmers establish the practice of helping drain the water from the paddy fields through the sluice gates, this will help create an environment for intercultural efforts in the Aman season. In areas where river water quality permits Aus rice cultivation, hybrid/HYV rice will be introduced in the Aus season (April-July) depending on the farmer's choice. After that, HYV Aman rice will be grown during (July-November) under rain-fed conditions, with the seedlings being raised in separate fields. Where the soil moisture permits, leguminous non-rice crops will be relayed in the Aman rice fields to enhance productivity and soil health. Thus, another Aus-Aman-Rabi pattern can be developed for different areas on the coast.

In places with insufficient fresh water for rice crops, farmers can introduce Maize, Sunflower, Sweet Potato, Mungbean, Sesame etc. in the dry season (November-May) to combat climate change scenarios. In all of these cases, lands will be ploughed using power tillers, and irrigation will be supplied by LLP. In the case of non-rice crop cultivation, lands will be prepared after the harvest of Aman rice to conserve soil moisture and to reduce salt build-up in the topsoil. Straw mulching may be adopted after sowing seeds for further moisture conservation and better crop growth. In heavy-textured soils, appropriate surface drainage will be established to save the non-rice crops from the moisture of excess rainfall in the dry seasons (the excess rainfall in March/April may be a climate change phenomenon). Successful introduction of non-rice crops in the dry season, followed by Aman rice, will yield a Rabi-Aman cropping pattern. Thus, the farmers will have new and/or improved cropping patterns that may produce 6-27 t/ha per year (the upper limit is much higher due to the higher yield of Sweet Potato compared to Rice and Maize) against the present production levels of 2-4 t/ha per year (since most are limited to single-cropped areas). Through these processes, farmers will be able to select suitable rice and non-rice crop varieties and will be able to adopt appropriate water management technologies to combat climate change and ensure higher productivity of food crops.

Materials & Method

This paper is based on available secondary sources on the causes of salinity intrusion along the coastal belt of Bangladesh. It includes the collection of information on various factors of coastal salinity intrusion from online publications, books, government reports, international reports, scientific journals, news articles and socioeconomic and statistical data used from the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS).

Major Constraints of the Coastal Belt

In general, the major constraints of coastal belts that impede development are as follows:

- Constraints increase with rising intensity of salinity. Soil salinity is the most dominant limiting factor in the region, especially during the dry season. It affects certain crops at different levels of soil salinity and at critical stages of growth, which reduces yield, sometimes destroying it completely. A substantial area of land is affected by saline water through the tides. Appropriate management practices for crop production in this area are not available.
- The fertility of most saline soils range from low to very low in respect to organic matter content, nitrogen, phosphorus and micronutrients like zinc and copper. Consequently, the crop yields obtained in these soils are also low.
- The scarcity of quality irrigation water during the dry season limits the cultivation of boro rice and rabi (winter) crops, and aus cultivation during the kharif-1 (March-July) season.
- The variability of rainfall, uncertain dates of onset and recession of seasonal floods and risk of drought restrict cultivation of aus and aman rice. Uncertain rainfall delays sowing and transplanting; and flood damages aus and aman crops. Heavy monsoon rainfall causes delays in the transplanting of aman and, sometimes, flash floods wash away the standing crop.
- Narrow technological and germplasm bases for salt-tolerant crops limit crop choices. On the other hand, extensive production of a particular cultivar of crop year after year increases susceptibility to pests and diseases. Threats like hispa, leaf-hoppers and the tungro virus are prevalent in the region, causing extensive damage almost every year.
- The short winter season, coupled with the late Aman harvest, restricts the timely sowing/planting of rabi (winter) crops.
- The presence of saline groundwater within a 1.0 meter depth throughout the year also harms crop production in the saline belt.
- A considerable area of the coast is within different polders, where soil salinity levels have not decreased considerably. This is a serious obstacle to the adoption of HYV aman and HYV aus in these areas.
- The texture of most of the saline soils varies from silt clay to clay. Land preparation becomes very difficult as the soil dries out. Deep and wide cracks develop and the surface soil becomes very hard, requiring deep and rapid tilling.
- Perennial waterlogging due to inadequate drainage and the faulty operation of sluice-gate facilities restricts the potential use of low lands within the poldered areas.
- The lack of appropriate extension programs, and of people trained in saline soil management, disrupts the diffusion of modern technologies and HYV utilization.
- Large-scale land ownership, unfavorable land tenure systems and the dominance of absentee farmers discourage the adoption of modern technologies.
- Difficult communication and remote marketing facilities also hinder the agricultural development of the region.

Strategies for the Management of Coastal Saline Soils

1. Building protective embankments: Land may be protected from inundation of saline water through the establishment of appropriately sized embankments; the recommended size is 1 meter above the high tide level.

2. Providing sluice gates on the embankments: Functioning sluice gate should be positioned along the embankment system to remove excess water and prevent the ingress of saline water during high tide.

3. Leveling land: Slight variations in the micro-relief lead to salt accumulation in raised spots. Land should be properly leveled to prevent the accumulation of water in the low-lying patches with shallow groundwater tables, and to facilitate the uniform drainage of excess water. This will also help to apply irrigation water uniformly in rabi seasons, and facilitate the uniform germination and better growth of crops.

4. Storing excess rainwater for irrigation: A part of the excess water stored in ponds after meeting the requirements of the kharif season can be utilized for rabi crops during the dry period.

5. Selecting kharif rice variety: Even though the coastal area is relatively flat, there are elevation differences in some areas, where the depths of standing water ranges from 15 to 90 cm. Selecting available rice varieties (BRRI dhan 23, 30, 40 and 41) on the basis of standing water and extent of salinity in the field can overcome the problems of this situation to a great extent.

6. Introducing crops in rabi (winter) season: Cropping intensity can be increased by about 0.596 million hectares in very saline (S1) and slightly saline (S2) areas by adopting proper soil and water management practices and introducing salt-tolerant crop varieties.

7. Keeping land covered in winter and summer months: The groundwater along the coast is saline and at a shallow depth (about 1.0 meters). Keeping lands fallow leads to high salinity due to the evaporation of soil moisture. It is recommended to avoid this during rabi season and to instead grow salt-tolerant crops that will help lower salinity.

8. Fertilizing crops: Since the soils are generally not fertile and have a low organic matter content, it is necessary to apply appropriate fertilizers to boost crop production. Potash fertilizers have an added advantage under soil salinity since they lower sodium (Na) uptake by plants and increases potassium (K) uptake. Thus K fertilization protects crops from the harmful effects of Na.

9. Providing sub-surface drainage: In many parts of the coastal area, salinity is very high. Leaching the salts is an effective way of reducing salinity for effective cultivation. It is also necessary to lower the water table and to maintain it below the critical depth, to prevent the saline water from affecting the crops grown. To achieve this, a proper sub-surface drainage has to be installed to keep the ground water at least 1 meter below the soil surface. This technology is effective; however, it is also somewhat expensive.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Conclusion: Climate change is not only an environmental concern but also a development concern for Bangladesh; this means that the issue of climate change must be thought of as more than an environmental problem to be able to take centre stage as a collection of development issues. Coastal areas in Bangladesh constitute 20% of the country of which about 53% are affected by different degrees of salinity; and salinization is one of the major natural hazards hampering crop production. Declining land productivity and a growing negative nutrient imbalance is among the main concerns regarding food security problems in the country. Salinity has received very little attention in the past but with the pressure of a growing population's demands on food, it has become imperative to explore the possibilities of increasing the agricultural potential of these (saline) lands for to meet those demands. Thus, combating the land salinization problems through long term management strategies is vital for food security.

Vulnerability in the coastal areas varies spatially and temporally. People living in these areas need to find adaptations methods to climate-change related risks, which will prevent the need to move away from their homes. Even though climate change is unstoppable, it is still likely to be slow in its manifestations; this gives the communities at risk the chance to develop preventative and adaptive strategies, especially in terms of food security. Improving the crop-based weather and flood forecasting systems, using early warning systems, developing drainage, cultivating adaptive crops, developing technology for floating-bed agriculture, rice and fish culture and organized fisheries, etc. are some of the options available for waterlogged areas.

The impact of climate change on agriculture is undeniable and will most certainly worsen if governments and donors fail to take suitable steps right now. Bangladesh urgently needs support to develop climate-resilient agriculture for its people to survive and prosper in the long term.

Major steps include the shift from local to improved high yielding crop varieties. Several new crops have been introduced and average yield has increased due to varietal improvements. Agriculture rehabilitation through increased cropping intensity and new, appropriate cropping patterns can be one of the most effective and sustainable strategies for mitigating the risks of crop failure during cyclones and other natural calamities. Large-scale block demonstration with active participation from the farmers is an effective approach in disseminating agricultural technologies in farming communities. Meticulous demonstration it has proved that year-round high yielding and hybrid rice cultivation through the very unique 'block' approach will be an effective means to assure food security, increase productivity and disseminate effective technical knowledge of crop cultivation.

Recommendations for further study:

- **Dissemination and Extension of Climate Resilient Agricultural Adaptation Options:** Block farming year-round crop adaptation practices should be demonstrated to develop climate resilient agricultural systems and to reduce risks of food security. The viable adaptation options need to be tested and disseminated at pilot villages for their acceptance. More study is needed for

making location-specific production plans that develop climate resilient coastal agriculture based on soil-crop-climate suitability through the proper assessment of soil and water-related constraints, climate risks and socio-economic problems presently affecting crop production systems and livelihood of the vulnerable people of the coastal region.

- **Water management infrastructures development and management:** Water resource management infrastructures such as protective embankments, proper sluice gates, canal excavation and re-excavation inside coastal polders for improved drainage systems and for conservation of rainfall and fresh river water for irrigation in the dry season is necessary for adopting climate resilient agriculture and ensuring food security of the coastal community. Therefore, water management infrastructures should be developed and maintained, focusing on the consequences of climate change and agricultural requirements.
- **Adoption of stress-tolerant crops:** Salinity, submergence and drought-tolerant crops should be introduced to develop climate resilient agriculture, to reduce the risk of crop damage and to improve food security and livelihoods of the coastal communities of the country.
- **Capacity building:** The farmers and the agricultural extension personnel should be trained on improved, innovative and climate resilient adaptation practices for wider dissemination of the technologies for food security of the expanding population.
- **Encouraging Women's Involvement in Agriculture:** The participation of women in homestead farming, seed production & preservation, compost making, agro-processing, fish and livestock production in the homestead areas should be encouraged to further improve the climate resilience of the coastal communities of Bangladesh.
- **Marketing infrastructures development:** Road networks, marketing infrastructures and agro-processing facilities should be developed to ensure the price of farm produce and fair access of agricultural input.
- **Coordinated Actions for Continuous Adaptation** – Adaptation to reduce the vulnerability of agriculture and allied sectors to the impacts of climate change requires coordinated actions, proper planning, financial resources for implementation and community involvement to improve coastal agriculture.

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MAKING MARKETS WORK FOR THE CHARS



MAKING MARKETS WORK FOR THE CHARS

Fouzia Nasreen, General Manager, M4C project, Swisscontact
Subrata Kumar Kundu, Market Development Director, M4C project, Swisscontact

Abstract

There are around 900 chars (river islets) in the north and north-west of Bangladesh which are formed by three major rivers; the Jamuna, Padma and Teesta. These chars are home to more than 2 million people (600,000 households). Economic opportunities for poor and vulnerable char dwellers, who mainly depend on agriculture and livestock for their livelihoods, are scarce owing to the geographical isolation, lack of access to basic services, weak markets and effects of climatic hazards such as floods. However, with fertile soil and land available for agriculture, the chars hold potential to become prominent production zones for both crops and livestock. Making market systems in the chars function better therefore holds a sizeable opportunity to contribute to sustainable, pro-poor growth in the region.

The 'Making Markets Work for the Jamuna, Padma and Teesta Chars' (M4C) project aims to reduce the poverty and vulnerability of char households in ten districts of northern Bangladesh (Bogra, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Pabna, Tangail, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, and Rangpur) by facilitating market systems that enhance opportunities for employment and income generation. The M4C is a 5-year project, mandated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, and implemented by Swisscontact and Practical Action, in collaboration with the Rural Development Academy, Bogra. The project office is based within the Rural Development Academy campus, Bogra, with an experienced team of 26 professionals, it partners with national NGOs and consulting firms to implement its activities in the field.

The current portfolio of M4C primarily consists of agricultural crops such as maize, chilli, jute, onion, groundnut, mustard and rice but also includes handicrafts, char transport systems and financial services. M4C, as the name suggests, applies the Making Markets Work for the Poor (M4P) approach, and has been facilitating a broad range of public agencies (research), private companies (agri-input, agro-processing) and local service providers (retailers, traders etc.) to promote and provide products and services, strengthen supply chains and to test new business models to bring about required changes in market systems. The broader change M4C aims to attain is to have market actors (private and public) realize the potential of char markets and adopt feasible business/service models to expedite economic growth on the chars. M4C also addresses issues related to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in its activities within these sectors.

M4C has also supported the formation of 419 producer groups (comprising of 11,500 char producers, 18% of whom are women) to improve the collective and adaptive capability of char households, thus making them 'market-ready,' with the skills to participate in the market system, adapting as required to demand and supply. This base of producer groups serves as a platform for market actors (ranging from large agro-input companies, local suppliers, regional and even char traders) to transact and build business relationships with char households. M4C, through its sub-contractors (local NGOs,) applied participatory tools (under the Participatory Market System Development or PMSD framework from Practical Action) to facilitate the formation and strengthening of these producer groups. In so doing, M4C intends to sustain the linkages and rapport between char households and the market actors, thus enabling a flow of products and services to and from the chars. Factoring in appropriate incentives is important in order for public and private entities to adopt viable and sustainable business/ service models for the chars.

Since 2012, the project has facilitated the provision of quality products and services from 13 large private companies, more than 300 local entrepreneurs and 5 government agencies. These market actors are realizing the potential of the chars and are adopting char-suitable business/ service models that are sustainable and will continue to benefit the char households. The project has integrated disaster risk reduction measures in its interventions whereby the use of wind-resistant seed varieties and other agro-inputs resulted in reduction of disaster losses by 20-40% for the char households. By June 2015, around 40,000 char households will have benefitted from M4C, with increased income from agricultural production as a result of using improved products/ services facilitated by the project. In addition, M4C has contributed to improving women's economic empowerment by facilitating services relevant to women's role in agricultural production, having now reached around 21,000 char women.

1. Introduction

Making Markets Work for the Jamuna, Padma and Teesta Chars¹ (M4C) is a 5-year project, mandated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) and Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, and implemented by Swisscontact and Practical Action in collaboration with Rural Development Academy, Bogra. M4C aims to reduce poverty and vulnerability of char households in ten districts of northern Bangladesh (Bogra, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Sirajganj, Pabna, Tangail, Kurigram, Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari, and Rangpur) by facilitating market systems that enhances opportunities for employment and income generation. The project office is based in the Rural Development Academy Campus, Bogra.

The current portfolio of M4C largely includes agriculture/farming sectors such as maize, chilli, jute, onion, groundnut, mustard plus handicrafts as non-farm and char transport system and finance as cross-cutting sectors. M4C has undertaken several interventions in these sectors since 2012 based on analysis from the field and implemented in partnerships with relevant private and public stakeholders. As opposed to direct service provision, M4C's approach is to facilitate broad range of public agencies (research, extension), private companies (agri-input, agro-processing) and local service providers (retailers, traders etc.) to promote and provide inputs and services, strengthen supply chains, test new business models to bring about required changes in the market systems. The project also engages national/local NGOs/consulting firms as its subcontractors for implementation of activities in the field.

2. Char Context

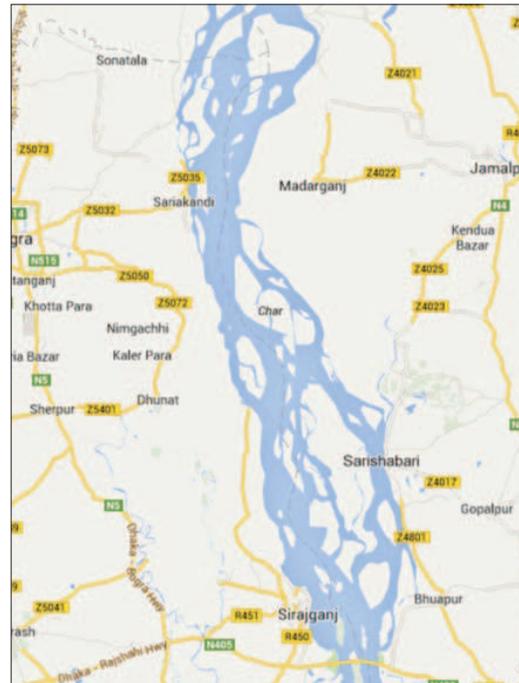
The three major rivers of Bangladesh, Jamuna, Padma and Teesta, flow through north-west Bangladesh depositing silt from the Himalayas. The islands formed through silt deposition and erosion – the chars – have an average life expectancy of some 20 to 30 years. There are over 900 recognized chars in the ten districts in M4C target locations.

The Northern chars are comprised of more than 600,000 households² or around 2.50 million women, men and children. These households are poor and vulnerable due to the geographical disconnect, lack of access to basic and economic services and effects of climatic shocks such as floods.

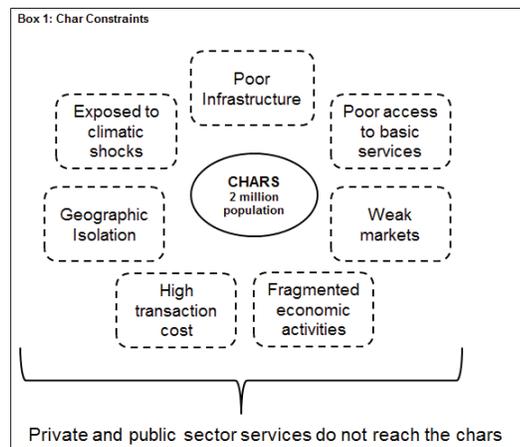
The chars are highly vulnerable to floods and erosion and chars dwellers may be forced to move home five or more times during their lives. Government health and education services as well as agricultural extension services are poorly developed or absent. During the dry season, conversely, many char lands suffer from drought due to low water retention in silty/sandy soils. Box 1 highlights the constraints of the chars.

¹ Chars are islands formed through silt deposition and river erosion.

² Data from the Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP), an asset-transfer project working on the chars since 2004



Char dwellers have few economic assets, minimal access to basic service or markets and consequently few economic opportunities. Share-cropping, irregular poorly-paid agricultural day labour and livestock rearing are the main income sources for the poorest households. Food security for many households is supplemented by homestead gardens and subsistence fishing. Male household members often migrate for seasonal labour opportunities to the mainland – but this leaves female-headed households more vulnerable.



Despite the geographic vulnerability of the chars and their isolation from the mainland, the chars hold potential for a number of economic sectors such as a) livestock rearing due to the comparative advantage of land available for grazing and perhaps ironically, isolation from sources of diseases; and b) agriculture due to the alluvial nature of the soils that makes it fertile for certain crops. A diversified range of crops such as rice, maize, groundnut, onion, pumpkin, gourd and other pit-crop vegetables, mustard,

chilli, turmeric, fodder for livestock are being cultivated in the chars. These crops are both a potential source of income for households leasing land plots, and could also contribute to demand for agricultural labour. Although the above potential exists, lack of access to quality inputs, knowledge and skills on farming, information on and linkages to markets, etc. hold back the poor char households to benefit from farming optimally. An improved market system with inflow of the required input/ services into the chars will sustainably improve this situation.

3. Strategic Approach to Make Markets Work for the Chars

Chars have the potential of becoming a prominent production zone of Bangladesh due to the higher soil fertility (than mainland) and availability of fallow land (due to lack of investments) that can be brought under cultivation. This potential of the chars, if harnessed, will ensure pro-poor growth which will improve the socio-economic conditions for the population living under such vulnerable conditions. The broader change that M4C aims to pursue is that market actors (private and public) realize the potential and adopt feasible business models to expedite the economic growth on the chars. The diagram in the following page highlights the broad strategic framework and the expected theory of change of M4C.

Besides a lead firm approach, in order to facilitate market system changes which include and benefit the chars households, M4C supported formation of 419 producer groups (comprising of 11,500 char producers of which 18% are women) to improve collective and adaptive capability of char households thus making them “market ready” to demand/ supply appropriately in the market system. This base of producer groups served as a means/ platform for market actors (ranging from large input companies, local suppliers, regional traders and even char traders) to transact and build business relationships with the char households. M4C, through its sub-contractors (national NGOs) applied participatory tools (under the participatory market system development or PMSD framework of Practical Action³) to form, develop and strengthen these producer groups. By facilitating these producer groups on the chars, M4C intends to sustain the enhanced trust/ relationship/ linkages between char households and the market actors thus enabling flow of relevant products and services to and from the chars.

At the same time, M4C has been facilitating market actors ranging from local to national private and public sector to test and pilot new business models and scale up activities on the chars. Where feasible, M4C also facilitated formation of producer groups by the market actors – in case of contract farming for maize and groundnut. Realizing appropriate incentives is important for such entities to adopt viable and sustainable models for the chars.

In brief, the key principles of the project are as follows:

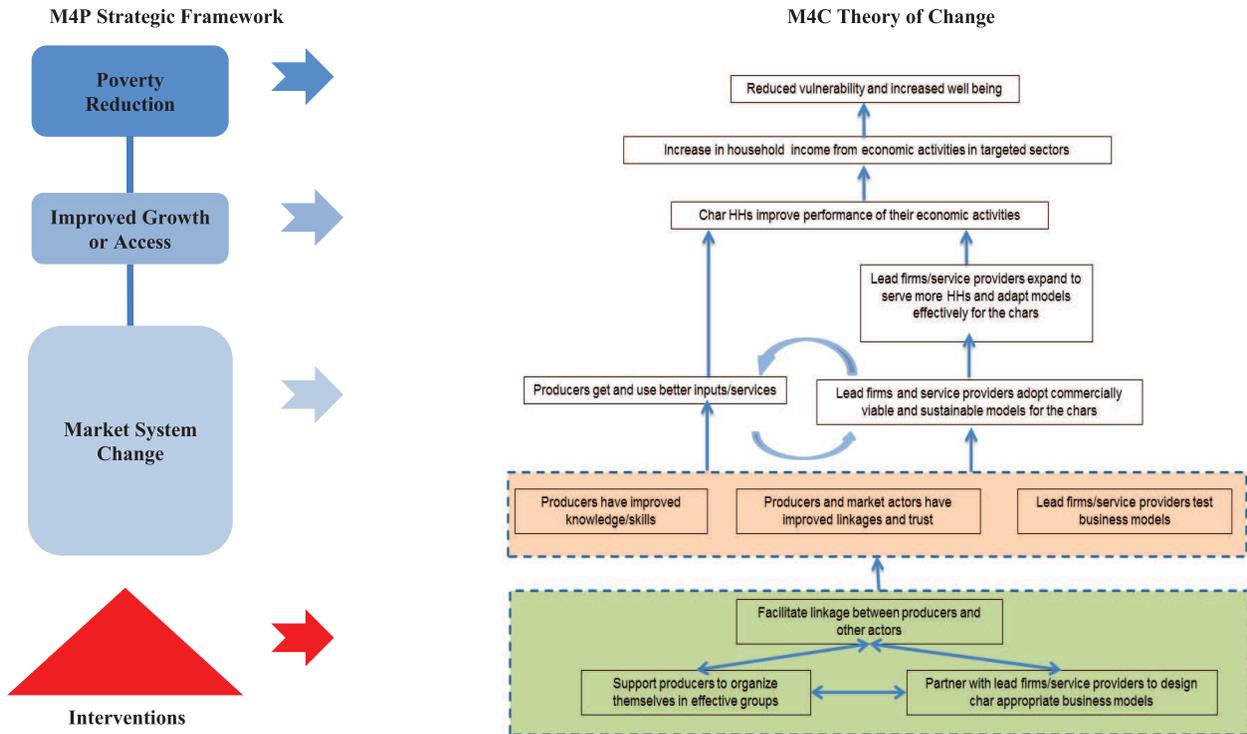
- a) Partner with relevant private and public entities to improve inputs/services to the char households

Profile of producer group members

- Char residents, 26% members are CLP graduates
- Engaged in at least two of the M4C agricultural sectors (maize, chilli and jute or onion, mustard and groundnut)
- Avg. landholding < 2.5 acre (avg. land engaged in selected crops <80 decimals)
- Avg. monthly income from agriculture of BDT 1,850 (approx.)

³ www.slideshare.net/pmsd-map

- b) Support innovative and char-suitable business models/ investments on the chars
- c) Facilitate systemic changes
- d) Adopt strategies that enhance women’s economic empowerment (access to skills, opportunities, etc.) on the chars
- e) Develop strategies that mitigate effects of climatic hazards on economic activities on the chars



4. M4C’s Portfolio and Systemic Objectives

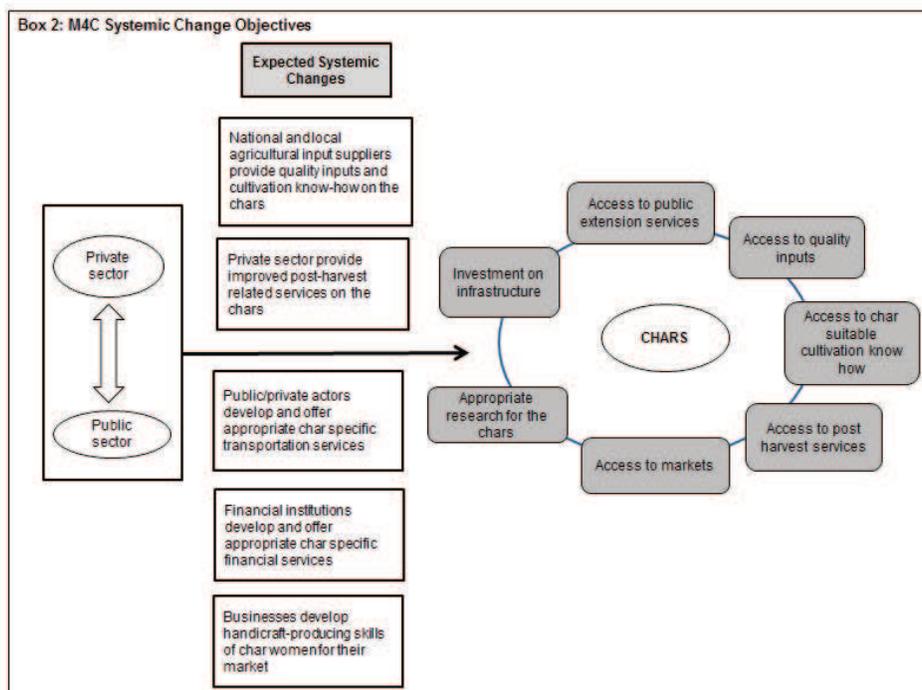
Over two and half years of implementation period, the project’s portfolio has gradually developed and expanded to include high growth/outreach sectors and then moving into sectors with more inclusive growth potentials in the char context - such as groundnut that can be grown in sandy soils which is vastly available but underutilized on the chars - but has low presence of strong market actors. Furthermore since rice is an important crop for food security for the chars, the project has designed relevant interventions for rice in 2014-15.

The M4C sectors were selected based on set criteria like beneficiary outreach, growth potential, market demand, involvement of women, disaster risk reduction potential and availability of intervention partners through area assessment studies and stakeholder consultation. In addition to the on-farm sectors (agriculture) and off-farm sector (handicrafts), the project has chosen to work in char transport and finance - two key cross-cutting sectors affecting the other sectors and overall livelihood of the char dwellers. As shown in the following diagram, the project works in 7 agricultural sectors and 2 cross-cutting sectors to address key issues such as transport and financial services.



During its inception, M4C realized that not enough agricultural research (both by public or private sector) have been done on the chars to develop seed varieties and cultivation techniques suitable for topographic and agro-climatic conditions of the chars. Hence, besides implementing interventions in the selected sectors, the project team focused on innovation and conducted several Action Researches to test innovation and new opportunities that could have large scale impact for the char households.

M4C works with private and public partners to stimulate “sustainable changes in terms of business innovation, investments, expansion and/or business attitude towards chars and service delivery”. Creating systemic changes on the chars will result in better functioning markets which will benefit the poor char households. M4C hence defines five key systemic changes as presented in the following diagram.



5. M4C's Target Group

Agricultural sectors is central to M4C's portfolio and hence the project targets households with functional- access to farming land. It is helpful to distinguish various categories of household according to their functional-access to land (meaning those who have no formal title or legal ownership of the land but farm on leased land or as share-cropper). The agriculture producing households can be categorized as follows:

- a) Functionally-landless households: Meaning in this case, households which have no access to productive land, except through daily employment as agricultural labour, or by migrating to the mainland for work. Based on analysis by M4C using CLP data⁴, the population in this category has declined from around 30% to 25% as a result of CLP's asset transfer programme.
- b) Marginal (seasonal) farming households: Households which have functional access to small plots of land (i.e. less than 1 acre or 0.4 hectares), which are essentially worked with unpaid family labour. Their access to land varies seasonally, due to flooding, so they may also engage in agricultural laboring / migration at certain times of the year. Many of these households suffer from food insecurity and fall into the category of extreme poverty even though they have some access to land.
- c) Small-scale farming households: Households which have functional access to larger areas of land (i.e. between 1 acre or 0.4 hectares to 2.5 acres or 1 hectare) and are consequently not generally food insecure. Although food secure, these households still are poor lacking investment capacities in farming. However, they are significant from a poverty-reduction perspective as employers of agricultural labour during periods of peak activity (e.g. land preparation, weeding, harvest-times, processing). Around 10 to 20% of these char households regularly employ women or men as paid agricultural labour.
- d) Large-scale farming operations are rare on the chars. Although defacto land-ownership is highly concentrated in the hands of a few „influential' families, they rarely live on the chars to oversee farming activities. Instead, their land is leased out or managed through share-cropping arrangements with marginal and small-scale farmers.

M4C thus targets the marginal and small-scale farming households in its agricultural sectors. The increase in economic activity of the households relevant to the targeted sectors is eventually expected to lead to more (on-char) labor opportunities for the functionally landless households.

6. M4C's Partnerships and Interventions across Sectors:

The following table highlights the range of partnerships developed by M4C that has brought in new and improved services for the char households.

⁴ CLP Report on "Differences in the socio-economic characteristics and nutritional status of households recruited earlier and later into the CLP1 Asset Transfer Programme" published in November 2010.

	Type of Actors	No.	Examples	Type of Interventions/Activities
Public Sector	Research Agencies	3	BJRI BARI RDA	Strengthening channels for promotion of char-suitable jute cultivation practices
	Extension Agencies	1	DAE	Promotion of improved seed retention practices
	Infrastructure Development	1	LGED	Inclusion of infrastructure development initiatives within LGED
Private Sector	Agro-input Companies	6	Auto Crop Care, ACI, Metal Seeds	Promotion and distribution of quality inputs
	Handicrafts	3	Dhaka Handicrafts	Training and employment of char women on handicrafts production
	Others	4	Dutch Bangla Bank Ltd.	Promotion and distribution of mobile financial services (MFS) in the chars Promotion and distribution of seasonal loan products (SLP) in the chars
	Local Service Providers	300	Maize Contractor Shelling Service Providers Drying Material Sellers	Promoting chilli cultivation through transplantation Introduction of contract farming Promoting improved post-harvest practices; promoting post-harvest facilities and services Promoting char-suitable transport design

Sector Strategies and Interventions in Agricultural Sectors							
Sectors Strategies and Interventions	Maize	Chilli	Jute	Onion	Mustard	Groundnut	Rice
Improving access to quality inputs and cultivation know-how - Promotion and distribution of quality inputs (seeds, micronutrients and crop protection solutions) - Introduction of groundnut seed contract farming model - Strengthening channels for promotion of char-suitable jute cultivation practices	Support Agro-Input Companies in Farmers'/Input Retailers' Training, Field Demonstrations	Support Agro-Input Companies, Spices Research Center (SRC) Farmers'/Input Retailers'/Seedling Sellers Training, Field Demonstrations	Support BJRI-DAE and Agro-Input Company in Farmers'/SAAOs/Input Retailers' Training, Field Demonstrations	Support Agro-Input Companies, Seed Suppliers in Farmers'/Input Retailers' Training, Field Demonstrations	Support Agro-Input Companies, Seed Suppliers in Farmers'/Input Retailers' Training, Field Demonstrations	Support Agro-Input Companies, Seed Contractors in Farmers'/Input Retailers' Training, Field Demonstrations	Support Agro-Input Companies in Farmers'/Input Retailers' Training, Field Demonstrations
Promoting improved post-harvest practices through better market linkage - Introduction and expansion of contract farming model - Promotion of better shelling services - Promotion and distribution of low cost drying materials - Promotion of improved post-harvest practices	1. Support Maize Contractors/Traders in Farmers' Trainings; Link with Feed Mills/Large Traders 2. Support Shelling Service Providers to buy shelling machine and promote shelling services to the farmers 3. Support Drying Material Suppliers to demonstrate and promote drying materials, technologies	1. Support Drying Material Suppliers to demonstrate and promote drying materials, technologies 2. Support Traders to learn and train Farmers on post-harvest practices; Link with Large Traders	Support BJRI-DAE in Farmers/Traders Training, Field Demonstrations; Link Traders to Jute Mills/Agents	Support Traders to learn and train Farmers on post-harvest practices; Link with Large Traders	1. Support Drying Material Suppliers to demonstrate and promote drying materials, technologies 2. Support Traders to learn and train Farmers on post-harvest practices; Link with Large Traders	1. Support Drying Material Suppliers to demonstrate and promote drying materials, technologies 2. Support Traders to learn and train Farmers on post-harvest practices; Link with Large Traders	1. Support Drying Material Suppliers to demonstrate and promote drying materials, technologies 2. Support Traders to learn and train Farmers on post-harvest practices; Link with Large Traders
Strengthening business relations between producers and other market actors - Formation of producer groups and sales & service centers (SSC)	Support formation of 300 Producer Groups and 10 Sales and Service Centers (SSCs) to improve access to quality inputs, cultivation know-how and post-harvest practices; encourage collective buying, selling and provision of other services through Producer Groups (in a small scale) and through SSCs (in a larger scale)			Support formation of 119 Producer Groups and 4 Sales and Service Centers (SSCs) to improve access to quality inputs, cultivation know-how and post-harvest practices; encourage collective buying, selling and provision of other services through Producer Groups (in a small scale) and through SSCs (in a larger scale)			

7. M4C's Gender Strategy

Char women are mainly engaged in livestock rearing as well in agricultural sectors as paid/unpaid labour. Women on the chars have to manage the fields when male members migrate to mainland for work. Climatic shocks and lack of resources make conditions even more challenging for women. M4C's gender strategy includes a three-pronged approach as mentioned below.

- a) Integrated - In case where women and men are involved in the same sectors, both receive needed supports and often take the same roles. For example, promoting knowledge on char-suitable cultivation practices among men/women engaged in the agricultural sectors.
- b) Targeted - This is applied when there is an opportunity to bring women into the economy. In some cases, targeted women's programs provide opportunities or entry points for later integration. For example, in case of the intervention where M4C facilitated an export oriented handicrafts manufacturing business to expand its network to char women.
- c) Dialogue - This means explaining project approaches, and encouraging others to be gender aware and proactive. For example, dialogue with private sector partners on the value of working with women as customers and suppliers, and the need to involve them in business models.

8. M4C's DRR Strategy

Chars and people living on the chars are prone to disaster risks because of the geographical position of the chars and peoples' inability to cope with the disaster. M4C focuses on reducing char household economic vulnerability caused by natural disaster by improving adaptability of agriculture and agricultural practices. The core elements of M4C's DRR strategy are:

- a) Promoting crops that are suitable for the char or post-disaster context
- b) Promoting agricultural inputs/ services which are more adaptable to the climatic challenges
- c) Promoting adaptive cultivation practices
- d) Facilitating capacity building of producers as well as other market actors through discussion, training and engagement

9. Results on the Ground

M4C measures its results following a seasonal year considering the major agricultural seasons (October to March and March to August). The following points highlight results based on current activities and impact projections until June 2015 while the further sections explain different facets of poverty impact achieved.

- a) 40,000 char households will be directly benefitted due to project interventions (project target 60,000 households);

- b) 80,000 households will have access to improved services (project target 90,000 households)
- c) Increased accumulated net income by approx. USD 4.5 million (50% of target) for char households
- d) Created access of improved services to around 21,000 women that enhanced their economic roles
- e) Use of wind-resistant seed varieties and other agro-inputs resulted in reduction of disaster losses by 20-40% for char households

Besides the above benefit to the target group, the project has encouraged/ facilitated provision of quality products and services of 13 large private companies, 300 local entrepreneurs and 5 government agencies. These market actors are realizing the potential of the chars and are adopting char-suitable models that are sustainable and will continue to benefit the char households.

9.1. Vulnerability

Vulnerability of char households is expected to eradicate from several years of increased income as households use additional income for practices that could reduce vulnerability such as diversifying sources of income, increasing savings, etc. Project assessments show that benefitted char households have indeed used their additional income for acquiring land in mainland (relief from life of exodus for the next generation), purchasing livestock, reinvesting in cultivation, repayment of loans or starting up new/ additional businesses – crop stocking, retail shops, etc. besides household expenses – children’s education, house renovation, etc. Before the end of the project in 2016, M4C plans to conduct a special study which examines the evidence of reduced vulnerability as result of increases in income.

Reinvesting additional income for a better future – story of Rekha Khatun

Life was a struggle throughout for Rekha Khatun and her 5 member family living at Rehaisuriber, Kazipur, Sirajganj. They lost all their land in river erosion 08 years ago and having no other option they had to come and settle on the chars where they now live on a rented land costing BDT 2,000 annually. Rekha’s husband previously worked as a salesperson in a grocery shop and after saving some money started his own grocery shop in 2011. However, with very low working capital it was difficult for them to bring more items and expand the business. He also worked as seasonal agriculture labour to earn additional income. Besides her household works, Rekha used to help her husband to run the shop time to time but always felt she could do more if she had an opportunity. In January 2013, Rekha learned that Hathay Bunano Proshikan Society (HBPS), supported by M4C, intends to engage char women to produce high quality handicraft items and they will provide a two-month long training on the char and at a centre close to her home. Rekha enrolled and after completing the training successfully where she learnt how to produce different soft toy items, she received raw materials and work order from HBPS. From April to November 2013, Rekha produced 200 pieces and earned BDT 5,000. She delivered all the products on time and not a single piece was rejected which was a big achievement for her. Firstly, she spent an amount of her income on her sons’ education (to purchase books, pens, etc. and to pay tuition fees). She invested the remaining amount (BDT 3,000) in their grocery shop. With this additional capital, they bought more items to sell. Rekha feels with income from handicrafts, she and her husband could make their shop even bigger and earn more. She even runs the shop when her husband is away. With her contribution to the family well-being, Rekha feels confident and contributes in decision-making in the family.

9.2. Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE)

Through its interventions, M4C has promoted 14 services relevant for enhancing economic roles of women on the chars, creating access to those services for around 21,000 char women. As agricultural activities on the chars are done by both women and men members of the char households, M4C monitors five key outcomes of WEE as a result of its interventions. The following points highlight impact of M4C interventions based on an assessment conducted in March 2014.

a) Increased income

- 74% of women working on the family farm indicated that their improved capacity had led to increased income for the household
- 400 handicraft producers were linked to markets and began earning for the first time
- With increased earning and decreased interest payments, additional income generating activities were established such as livestock
- Women who are involved in producer groups received more intense training and therefore realized greater income increases

b) Access to Opportunities and Resources

- More than 15,000 women (30% of total participants) were involved in farmers' meetings, field days etc. held by input companies/traders. The majority of women interviewed identified improved access to inputs, information and training, markets.
- 400 women on the chars were involved in handicraft making as an income generation opportunity for the first time. They acquired new skills, linkages to buyers, and inputs for production from the buyers – leading to increased household income

c) Change in Women's Roles

- More than half the women surveyed reported that they took on new roles such as in case of chilli seed treatment, maize contract farmer 359 women (more than 10% of the total), demo plot owners while many more upgraded current roles to be more productive with improved health and safety
- Others reported 'soft' outcomes such as receiving respect from the community and status in the household, developing confidence, and becoming role models

d) Decision-Making Authority

- Women report increased household decision-making authority as a result of programme interventions. For example, 75% have increased decision-making at home, 70% said that now household decisions are always made jointly
- Assessments show that handicraft producers make decisions to use their income to support family expenses, children's primary education and for savings/investment in goat/sheep/poultry rearing and in family-run shops

e) Manageable Workloads

- The majority of women reported no significant or challenging changes in workload, and therefore increased participation is manageable while few of the women interviewed experienced challenges to attend meetings or trainings
- In case of handicrafts, women changed their time management and recruited family members to support them

9.3. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

From M4C assessments, it's evident that the crops, inputs (or services) and cultivation practices are demonstrating better resilience to the climatic challenges of the chars. The project has considered DRR in its portfolio construction as well as in its interventions thus promoting 14 DRR relevant services. Following points present some highlights:

- a) Besides supporting expansion of char-suitable crop like maize, M4C included mustard and groundnut in the portfolio which could be grown in difficult conditions such as after late flood when rice is damaged (mustard), on fallow land without much inputs/irrigation (groundnut) to particularly help the smallholders.
- b) The project supported input companies to promote char-suitable inputs such as high yielding but drought, wind-resistant maize varieties (Miracle, Titan, and P-3396), fungicides (Cabrio Top/Coragen/Penncozeb) that reduced effects of prolonged cold wave/fog on chilli through retailer trainings, farmer meetings, field demonstrations followed by field days. Approximately 10,000 farmers used these maize seed varieties and 6,000 maize and chilli farmers used fungicides. Use of these products resulted in 50-100% higher production (maize) and 20-40% reduced crop loss than those who did not.
- c) The project supported promotion of char-suitable cultivation techniques such as chilli cultivation through transplantation method to save crops from being washed away by late flood/rain and timely sowing of jute through irrigation to help plants mature before the flood hits; 10 chilli farmers (through demo plots) and 4,700 jute farmers have observed clear benefits (such as 133% higher profit from chilli, higher plant growth, 30% higher production likely, which is essential for quality jute fiber) over traditional practices in both cases.
- d) The project also supported promotion and distribution of low-cost drying materials as well as testing of storage facilities to reduce post-harvest losses and improve scopes for storage to mitigate effects of disasters. 5,600 maize and chilli farmers benefitted from use of different kinds of drying materials. Business model for production and supply of maize silage during floods is also being tested.
- e) In 2013, M4C conducted a study⁵ (engaging reputed DRR experts) that re-confirmed the projec's focus on DRR measures such as promoting char suitable varieties/cropping pattern, introducing improved post-harvest techniques and promoting low-cost drying facilities to avoid affect from rain.

Farmers learn to cope with flood – testimonial of a chilli seedling seller

I have been producing chilli seedlings on the chars for my cultivation successfully for the last 04 years but never thought of producing and supplying seedlings to neighboring farmers on a commercial basis. As I was approached and supported by M4C team, I took the opportunity to demonstrate my knowledge and experience by setting up few demonstration plots. I supervised the demo plots and provided guidance to the demo farmers time to time and very happy to share the success with everyone. Char farmers were skeptic about transplantation method but now the practice and its benefits are proven to many. It can not only mitigate the losses from late flood/rain but can yield double profits for the farmers compared to broadcasting and existing cropping pattern.

⁵ Study titled "Impact of Disasters on Market Systems at Char Areas" conducted by experts from the Institute of Water and Flood Management under BUET and Post Graduate Programme in Disaster Management under BRAC University.

4. Systemic Change and Sustainability

Systemic change is at the core of M4C's approach. It refers to the change in the underlying causes of market performance - typically in the rules and supporting functions - that can bring about more effective, sustainable and inclusive functioning of the market system in favor of the poor. The project has defined five potential systemic changes for the chars. In the chars, eliciting systemic changes will be an evolving process. The process will involve raising awareness on the opportunities of the chars, capacity building of public institutions (including establishment of new institutions), capacity building of private institutions, improving the capacity of char dwellers in utilizing resource and information and setting up new infrastructures. The project takes an incremental approach towards bringing in changes in institutions, relationship and service delivery in the chars, starting from a very low base.

NAAFCO observes business in the chars, says Director of NAAFCO Group

NAAFCO Group partnered with M4C project to promote quality micronutrient and pesticides (for onion, mustard and groundnut) through establishing a supply network (for the first time) in the char villages of Rangpur region. After the activities, we have established our networks in those chars. Farmers are very happy using our products due to its quality. Now, we are confident to expand our business in the char areas for better access of the char farmers. NAAFCO is very happy to be part of such activities which created new business for us and better livelihoods for the char farmers.

In case of creating the market readiness of the char households, where feasible, M4C looked for opportunities such as contract farming where the contractors were motivated to form producer groups thus enhancing the potential for sustainability of the model. While in case of the producer groups formed through M4C subcontractors, the initial hands-on approach to form these groups was necessary to ensure more inclusiveness, enhance the collective capability of the char households and establish better linkages with market actors. Although these groups may not exist in the exact same form as they are currently in, it is expected that the members will continue to work together and benefit from the established linkages. For example, 14 aggregation points or Sales and Service Centers (SSC) on the chars have been initiated by the producer groups based on demand from the group members for a more institutional set-up for collective benefits.

Indicators of systemic change such as leverage ratio, increased investment from the partner, adaptation of the model for the chars, changes in attitudes towards chars, etc. are being monitored by M4C.

Leverage Ratio: The project calculated the leverage ratio or the private sector investment brought into the chars due to partnerships with M4C. Until Dec 2014, of the total costs of interventions implemented in partnerships, 40% or CHF 287,698 has

M4C's value addition to Private Sector Initiatives

The essence of M4C's partnership with the private sector focused on reduction of initial investment risks in exploring the unchartered locations such as the chars. Besides the financial contribution of M4C, the mere information regarding the locations and potentiality of char villages is not always available to the private sector. With its footprint and through mobilization of producer groups on the chars, M4C motivated the private sector to test business models for the chars. Furthermore, M4C's business-like approach, analysis of business models and its potential impact on the private sectors business motivated the private sector ranging from a local trader to large input companies to understand the business case and expand to the chars.

been contributed by the private sector. This means that for every CHF 100 spent on these interventions, the private sector paid CHF 40 and M4C paid CHF 60. If contribution from the transport sector intervention (where a project of LGED, named RIDP II, under the Ministry of LGRDC contributed around CHF 345,000 for infrastructure development) is considered, M4C's leverage ratio increases to 60%. The above ratios do not include monetary and non-monetary contributions of the private and public sector beyond the scope of the project and spending by autonomously expanded firms.

Environmental Impact: M4C has been careful about the introduction of inputs to the chars that has reduced losses as well as increased yield for farmers. Appropriate measures for balanced and safe usage of such products were included in training modules and other dissemination tools during the activities. Furthermore, the project only partnered with reputed input companies in the market whose products are certified under government regulations for environment safety before they are released in the market. Where feasible to promote non-use of chemicals, indigenous methods such as in case of chilli seed treatment processes (tested by RDA) and seed retention practices (promoted by BARI) were promoted through M4C interventions.

10. Lessons and Recommendations

The project's experience shows that it is possible to facilitate private as well as public entities to sustainably serve the chars. However, these market actors need to develop customized and viable models to reach the chars which take time and resources. Development projects can expedite the process; however, the government bodies need to create favorable conditions for promoting private sector growth in the chars.

From the field experiences, following are some specific areas of development that can expedite the growth of economic sectors for the chars:

- a) Sponsor specific researches to identify char suitable agricultural practices
- b) Support private sector actors (national/local) to test business models, concepts, to promote inputs, services, etc.
- c) Build capacity and linkages with local stakeholders to achieve sustainability
- d) Form char producer groups to attract private/public sector actors
- e) Introduce bulk buying and selling through group formation
- f) Build capacity of farmers on DRR issues through public/private sectors
- g) Build capacity of women to enhance involvement in economic activities
- h) Involve local and national media to highlight the scope and potential of chars
- i) Dialogue with public/private sector actors regarding overall development of chars
- j) Engage local NGOs in the field to implement effective group building activities
- k) Engage public agencies in infrastructure development for the chars
- l) Promote mobile financial services and other means of financial inclusion on the chars

DRY CHILI MARKET IN BANGLADESH: PRESENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES



DRY CHILI MARKET IN BANGLADESH: PRESENT CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Dr. Shankar Kumar Raha, Professor, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh
Commissioned by OXFAM in Bangladesh

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Oxfam has been implementing the 'Resilience through Economic Empowerment, Climate Change Adaptation, Leadership and Learning' (REECALL) Program in Bangladesh since 2010. The project is working to build resilient communities through economic empowerment for women and men and to develop leadership in disaster-prone Northern char, haor, and Southern Coastal areas. Under the REECALL component, Oxfam has been implementing a number of development initiatives focusing on economic empowerment, particularly through women's economic leadership.

With a view to create economic leadership of poor and vulnerable women and men in hard-to-reach areas, Oxfam started a special endeavor which deals with the Chili value chain in chars (low-lying river islands, vulnerable to frequent flooding) where few market stakeholders are active and there are limited opportunities to explore. The project is titled the Enterprise Development Programme (EDP), a pilot program of Oxfam that provides an intelligent mix of loans and grants to small and medium enterprises, enabling people to work their way out of poverty.

EDP in Bangladesh centers on the development of the Chili Traders' Enterprise of Fulchari Upazila, Gaibandha. The enterprise, a registered cooperative farm, is linked with the larger processing companies such as PRAN and SQUARE of Bangladesh; it also operates its business in local and regional markets. The cooperative farm has a strong supply chain, well-equipped processing center and sufficient working capital to do business.

Local production of chili was low due to floods in 2012 and the quality of produce was also poor, which led processing companies to import dry chili from India. On them, imported chili is better in terms of heat/flavour, color, availability and price. As a result, domestic chili farmers have been placed in jeopardy and local actors in the chili market are losing interest in continuing the chili business.

In this context, Oxfam Bangladesh wanted to identify the root cause/s of the situation and to look for solutions to save the interests of native chili producers. The findings will lead them to organize a roundtable dialogue workshop at the national level involving policy makers, implementers and other stakeholders to develop workable programs to overcome the prevailing constraints in the dry chili business.

1.2 Rationale/Significance of the Study

Chili is one of the most important cash crops for char dwellers, and is well suited to char soils. It is highly profitable; many char households are involved in chili cultivation, harvesting and processing. It is relatively easy to cultivate and the crop can be harvested within three to four months. Considering its potential to eradicate poverty in the climate-vulnerable char islands, Oxfam and its partner NGOs have been organizing people in forms of inclusive CBO, preparing PGs, ensuring the necessary hardware and software support and establishing traders groups. The Chili Traders' Enterprise of Fulchari (CTE-f) is one of those initiatives.

The newly formed CTE-f has faced problems in selling dry chili. It is apparent that the market price of imported and foreign varieties of chili is lower than that of the native strains. It has also been claimed that Indian chili is better in quality. As a result, the industrial buyers i.e. large scale processors prefer Indian chili to native/local chili, and local varieties of dry chili have been facing tough competition against the imported varieties in terms of quality and price. However, there is scope for improvement of the quality of local chili and its survival in the market.

The present study attempts to focus on the current scenario, demand-supply position, market potential and opportunities available for this spice. Since its cultivation is prevalent in char areas, the crop is highly vulnerable to floods and erosion; consequently, disruptions in chili cultivation directly undercut the economic activities of char inhabitants.

1.3 Objective of the Study

General objective:

The overall purpose of the study is to review the country's dry chilli markets, existing potentials, constraints, demand and supply, and trade behaviour. The study will analyse the market trends of dry chilli (both national and regional), reviewing national and regional trade policy and understanding the demands of product quality and input availability. Based on the findings, the study will identify the necessary way forward with a view to sensitize policymakers in favour of local chilli traders and producers.

Specific objective:

1. To review national market demand for dry chili production and sales in terms of variety, quality and availability;
2. To analyse trade policy (export-import) related constraints that affect small and marginal chili farmers;
3. To explore the country varieties (from research bank) that have higher market demand, and to identify the scope to promote them; and
4. To identify constraints and opportunities related to stimulating the growth of native chili markets and to draw out the way forward.

1.4 Methodology of the Study

The study has primarily gathered information through *literature reviews*. Qualitative data depicting real issues was collected through *field surveys*.

Study area

The entry point was the group of chili producers of Fulchari Haat Gaibandha; markets in Bogra and in Shyambazar, Dhaka city, were also covered.

Population, samples, sampling technique

The population of the study includes chili growers, market actors at different levels, research organizations, government officials, processing companies and importers. Convenience sampling techniques were adopted for the selection of areas and respondents.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

Unavailability of national and local level data on chili sector: Chili is considered as a minor crop in Bangladesh; records of segregated national and local level data on dry chili production, demand, supply, export-import etc. is limited or is not recorded. Information of chili is merged with the spice and sometimes vegetable sectors (while discussing chili exports, interviewees mentioned that chilies were being exported along with vegetables, so the proportion of chili was therefore hard to measure).

Sample size might not be representative: The study sketched a macro-level situation of the dry chili business in Bangladesh. The population of the study includes chili growers, market actors at different levels, research organizations, government officials, processing companies and importers, drawn following the Convenience/Purposive sampling method, totaling 27 samples. Therefore, the sample size might not be representative of a macro environment.

SECTION TWO: SITUATION ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

2.1 National Market Review of Dry Chili

Among spices and condiments, chili is the most important and widely grown spice crop in Bangladesh. About 355,673 acres of land in Bangladesh is used for chili cultivation in both the Rabi and Kharif seasons; production (both green and dry chili) is about 205,108 MT (BBS 2013-14). Approximately 440,000 farmers are involved in chili cultivation, harvesting and processing (Calculated from BBS data).

2.1.1 National Production

Dry chili production in Bangladesh witnessed a decreasing trend in terms of production over the years 2005-2012 (FAOSTAT). To understand the changing patterns in area, production and yield, the compound Growth Rate was estimated. The results show that compound growth rates in area and production were -7.04% and -1.19% respectively (Table 2). However, the growth rate of yield was positive and highly significant. Bangladesh kept producing over 147,000 MT of dry chili every year. The lowest quantity of the decade was produced in 2009 (FAOSTAT); with several natural calamities ruining the crops and farmers' inability to recover the capital investment, many switched from dry chili production to maize.

Table 1: Area, Production and yield of dry chili by years

Year	Area Harvested (Ha)	Production (tones)	Yield (kg/Ha)
2005	154,812	185,635	1,199
2006	142,466	155,430	1,091
2007	141,490	153,955	1,088
2008	94,406	117,765	1,247
2009	89,268	109,337	1,224
2010	87,026	109,350	1,256
2011	104,967	176,134	1,677
2012	99,000	172,000	1,737
Compound Growth Rate	-7.04%	-1.19%	6.29%
Significant	0.025	0.752	0.009
Remarks	Significant	Highly insignificant	Highly Significant

Source: FAOSTAT 2012 | © FAO Statistics Division

2.1.2 Demand-Supply Situation

The total demand for dry chili is about 292,000MT (BSRC); Bangladesh is producing near about 172,000 MT of dry chili (FAOSTAT 2012). The resulting deficit causes Bangladesh to import dry chili every year, mainly from India which is the largest producer & exporter and contributes 25 percent to total world production.

Dry chili production in last few years has been hovering at an average of 147,000 MT while in 2012 production declined sharply due to significant damage to the standing crop.

2.1.3 Import-Export Scenario

The Imports

In addition to domestic production, the country has been importing increasing quantities of dry chili over the years. Natural calamities caused the production of chili in 2011-12 to fall to 47.28% lower than that of the previous year (2010-11). The lower production and increased demand led to an increase imports, which touched an all-time high of an estimated 40,484 MT valued at over BDT 485 crore in 2013-14.

Table-3 shows that Bangladesh has been experiencing an annual 37 percent growth rate in the import of dry chili since 2011-2012. The total import of chili during 2011-12 was 23,216 MT, valued at BDT 255 crore, which has risen to 40,484 MT valued at BDT 485 crore during 2013-14 (Table-2). The higher demand for dry chili after the climatic shocks in 2012 is further pushing the imports of dry chili.

Table 2: Import trend of dry & green chili, chili seed in Bangladesh

Type	Import Volume (in MT)		
	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014
Dry Chili	23,216	31,697	40,484
Green Chili	6,400	3,183	776
Chili Seed	223	138	90

Source: Deputy Director Office, Quarantine, DAE

On the other hand, the import of green chili has decreased from 6,400 MT to 776 MT, at a declining rate of 44 percent. Chili seed imports also show a similar declining trend; since 2011, the import of chili seed has decreased from 223 MT to 90 MT, at a declining rate of 30 percent.

Data also found that dry chilies are being imported through a number of land ports. The highest importation was witnessed in 2013-14 at Vomra land port (around 38,000 MT) followed by Sona Masjid of Satkhira (8,344 MT) and Benapole (580 MT). The lowest importation took place at the Hili port of Dinajpur.

Hili (Dinajpur)	: 244.725 MT
Vomra (Khulna)	: 38,000 MT
Benapole (Jessore)	: 580 MT
Chittagong	: 252 MT
Sona Masjid (Satkhira)	: 8,344 MT

According to the Spices Board of India and the research results of Karvy Comtrade Limited in 2011, Bangladesh is the third largest importer of chilies from India, which contributes 17 percent (34, 680 MT) to the total exports from India after Malaysia (26 percent) and Sri Lanka (19 percent).

The Exports

Bangladesh Bank data shows that the cost for the import of five major spices (onion, garlic, chili, ginger and turmeric) in the year 2006-07 was Tk. 6,108 million of which 0.60 percent was for chili (Bangladesh Bank, 2007). Bangladesh not only imports but also exports chili, though amount is not high and the trend is not consistent. Exports reduced by 1.82% in 2010-11 compared to 2009-2010, while it jumped by 152.29% in 2011-12 (Table-3). Bangladesh exported only 159 MT chili in FY 2012-13 which shows 3.19% reduction in export compared to the base period (Source: Deputy Director Office, Quarantine, DAE).

Table 3: Export of dry chili from Bangladesh by year

Year	Volume	
	In KG	In Thousand Taka
2009 - 2010	164,238.56	36,785.58
2010 - 2011	161,966.40	33,035.83
2011 - 2012	414,373.41	104,654.19

Source: HS Code Item-09042010: Dried Chilies, Dried Crushed Ground, EPB

2.1.4 Market Price

The annual and monthly wholesale prices of dry chili have been analyzed and their results shown below.

The average wholesale dry chili prices are shown in Table 5. The fixed base index number shows that the average wholesale price has been increasing from 2005-06 onward:

Table 4: Average wholesale price of dry chili in Bangladesh

Year	Taka/Quintal	Index
2003 - 04	7,610	100
2004 - 05	7,369	96.83
2005 - 06	5,978	78.55
2006 - 07	11,583	152.21
2007 - 08	12,596	165.52
2008 - 09	9,549	125.48
2009 - 10	12,223	160.62
2010 - 11	14,110	185.41
2011 - 12	15,385	202.17

Source: BBS, 2012 p.369

Seasonal Price Variation of Dry Chili

Seasonal price variation is an essential measure of the short-term fluctuations in time series data. It occurs within a year. The monthly data of five years from 2009 to 2013 was used for the construction of seasonal indices by taking the moving averages centered on 12 months. The calculated indices have been adjusted to 100 so that the total of seasonal indices for the 12 months adds up to 1200. The indices of wholesale dry chili prices at the national level are shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Seasonal price variation of dry chili at national level

Month	Seasonal price indices
January	98.54
February	103.72
March	103.09
April	98.89
May	97.66
June	99.21
July	95.38
August	98.64
September	100.78
October	100.91
November	103.18
December	100.01
Range	8.34

The price index of dry chili was the highest (103.72) in February and the lowest (95.55) in July. The data reveals that price index was higher than the average value in six months from September to March except the month of January. Arrival of early varieties may explain the lower index in January. Price indices were lower during the months of May to August, which is attributed to the increased importation of dry chili.

2.2 Using Chili Seeds – Local vs. Commercial

Most of the farmers use seeds of local varieties of chili. The seeds of local chili are kept by the chili growers while some hybrid seeds are sold by private seed companies. The government research institutes also develop and produce their own seed varieties. Traditionally, chili farmers apply the home retained seeds from their earlier year's production: they derive one KG of chili seed from six or seven KG of dry chili that costs around BDT 850-1000. The seed requirement per unit of area varies due to variation in chili strain, season, farm size and farmer's practices. Hasan (2013) found that farmers of different categories used on an average 20 kg seed for cultivating a hectare of land while the recommended seed rate was about 4 kg per hectare (Ullah et al. 2006). Assuming chili cultivation land did not reduce after 2011-12 then the seed requirement would be 960 MT. The seed requirements of different years are shown in Table 6.

Table 6: Chili seed requirement from 2001 to 2008

Year	Seed requirement, MT
2001 - 2002	90
2002 - 2003	60
2003 - 2004	60
2004 - 2005	360
2005 - 2006	460
2006 - 2007	500
2007 - 2008	600
Calculated from BBS datasheet	

Around 200 seed companies are operating in Bangladesh, though few of them offer chili seeds and have no varieties of dry chili. Also, this study did not find hybrid seeds being used in the char areas. Sonic, Premium, Bijli, 1701, Nandita, Indra, Laser, Ongarika, Heera 1701 etc. are the widely available commercial varieties of seed but these are only for green chili production.

The field study reveals that one of the seed companies sold 290 kg of chili seed at the rate of BDT 30,000 per kg. Another company sold about 200 kg chili at Tk. 30,000 per kg. As can be seen from these rates, the chili seed market is a potential area for the seed firms to receive substantial returns, however, the market needs further development.

2.3 Scenario of Local Haats

Local markets or 'Haats' are those which are located at village, Union and Upazila levels. They usually sit once or twice in a week on particular day at particular places in the village /Union while Upazila-level transactions may take place every day of the week. The scope of this research studies Fulchhari Haat in Gaibandha, one of the renowned Haats in Bangladesh for dry chili trading. The Haat witnessed the trading of 2500 MT dry chili in 2013, 80 percent of which was imported chili.

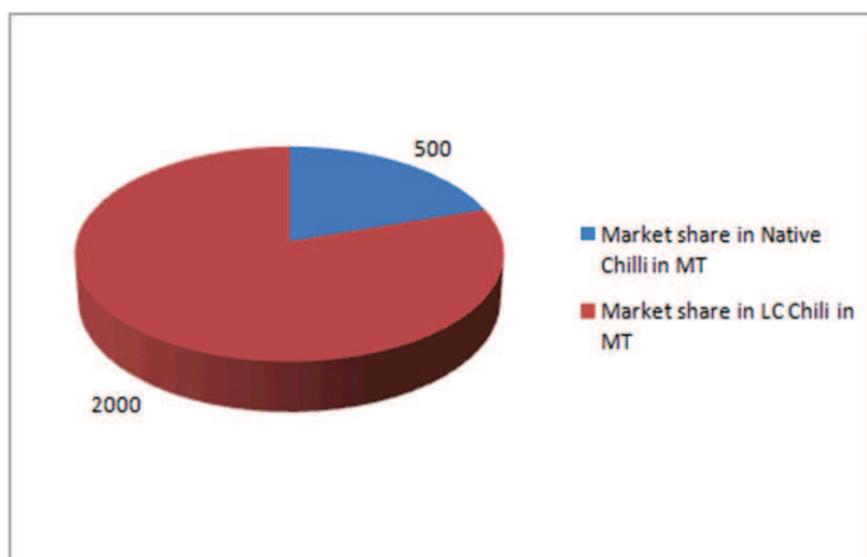


Figure 1: Market Share of imported chili vs. native chili, Fulchhari haat, 2013-14

The study has found an increasing trend of imported chili in Fulchhari haat over the last three years. The prevalence of imported chili began back in 2012 and has been increasing since then.

Price Comparison

While comparing the retail prices of dry chili it has been found that, despite being imported from India, imported dry chili costs relatively less than local dry chili: the selling price of native chili is BDT 160-180 per kg whereas the Indian chili is sold at BDT 150-170 per kg.

In Fulchhari Haat, the purchase price of one KG imported chili for a Faria (small trader) ranges between BDT 108-120, while the cost is around BDT 120-140 for native chili.

Driven by the motive of 'extra profit', traders or middlemen in Fulchhari Haat are more interested in working with imported chili; they purchase it at BDT 108 per kg and sell it up to BDT 170 (which is the sales price of native chili), resulting in an unexpected business profit of about 60 Taka from each KG of dry chili sales. Thus, the market is continuously experiencing an increased share of imported chili, demonstrated by the fact that every single shop or Arat is largely involved in the imported chili business.

2.4 Scenario of Regional Market

Bogra is the second largest chili-producing region in the country, next to Panchagar. The regions has grown 12,000 MT chili in 2013 (Source: BBS 2013-14), after Panchagar (14,000 MT). Accordingly, this region has multiple large and medium sized markets in the heart of the city.

The regional markets in Bogra have also been dominated by Indian LC dried red chilies over the last couple of years. The market traded 45,000 MT in dry chilies in last year, valued at BDT 2.5 Crore (consumer price), the highest among the regional markets of dry chili. Among the total traded volume, 50-60 percent was shared by the Indian chili.

Respondents from the regional market of Bogra reported that demand for local dry chili is much lower and has been declining since 2012. Moreover, the supply of local chilies cannot fulfill the year-round demand for dry chili, resulting in importation from India.

Here importers use to import chili to fulfill demand when local chilies are not available in the market. Importation remains higher during five months of a year, from May to September, as the rain starts and continues till late autumn. The volume of import increased to 27,000 ton in 2013 from 10,000 ton in 2012, almost thrice within a year.

Price Comparison

A different price scenario is prevalent in the regional market: the price of LC chili is higher than that of the local chili. The sales price of one KG native chili at the wholesale level is BDT 120; at the retail level the price goes up to BDT 140. Imported chili costs BDT 150 per kg at the wholesale level; the retail sales price is up to BDT 170. The profit earned by the importers is meager i.e. Tk. 200 to 250 per quintal of dry chili.

Despite the high price of LC chili, the market shows a higher demand for LC chili, contradicting the basic law of economics – “when price rises, demand falls”. This scenario puts forth the question – why do consumers (individual and institutional) still want LC chili at a higher price when the price of local chili is relatively low?

The answer to this problem lies within the facts of year-round availability and quality aspects of local chili. As reported, the regional market deals with a higher volume of dry chili, which cannot be covered solely by local production and local import. Imports from India are needed to meet the demand.

Local chili is also not as attractive in color, flavour and appearance. LC chilies are a relatively brighter red, are spicier and have a better shape. Thus, the demand for LC chilies at both the household and industry levels is higher.

2.5 Scenario of Terminal Market

The century-old market of ‘Shyambazar’ in Old Dhaka is half a kilometer long, bound by the Sadarghat Launch Terminal to the west, Banglabazar to the north and the river Buriganga to the south. This marketplace remains open seven days a week with a three-hour break on Friday, from noon to 3pm. Most of the products that the market are different perishable vegetables and dry food items such as onion, garlic, chili and ginger.

There are around 375 different shops in the market; some are just storehouses, while others belong to importers and wholesalers. Among these shops, 18 Arats are directly involved in chili (dry and green) trading; eight of them are large and the rest are small or medium sized businesses. Large Arats have the capacity to store 75 MT dry chilies at a time, while the small and medium sized stores are able to store 25 MT at a time and can sell ten times that amount. They act as commission agents of their clients i.e.

both suppliers and buyers of dry chili. Some deal in a variety of commodities while some handle only dry chili. They charge commissions at the rate of Tk. 1 per kg of chili. The cost involved in completing the transaction is borne by the suppliers and the buyers.

The total number of wholesalers in Shyambazar is about 15-20. They sell dry chili at a margin of taka 30 to 33 per kg.

Every day, about 40-45 small, medium and large chili traders (suppliers) do business in Shyambazar. The average trade volume of these chili traders is as follows.

For small traders : 10-12 MT
 For medium traders : 25-35 MT
 For large traders : 40-200 MT

Daily sales of dry chili varies in the range of 120 MT to 200 MT. the highest sales period of dry chili in Shyambazar market is reported during April-August while the trading declines in October-January.

Market Trend

Market observation shows that imported chili constitutes about 70% of the total market supply while the rest comes from different districts of the country. The major sources of supply are Shariatpur, Comilla, Barishal and Panchagar.

As reported by the traders of Shyambazar, the market has been experiencing the trading of imported chili from 2010 with a share of about 8 percent of the total supply since 2012, when the fall in production of local dry chili had to be balanced by increased imports. The increasing share of imported chili over the years in the market is shown below.

Table 7 shows that market share of imported chili has been increasing by an average of 1.8 times than the previous year. There was a spike in 2012, when market share of LC chili in Shyambazar increased by 2.67 times than 2011, recorded as the highest increase over the period 2010-2014.

Table 7: Percentage of imported chili in shyambazar market

Year	Percentage	Increase compare to last year (In times)
2010	8	-
2011	15	1.88
2012	40	2.67
2013	60	1.50
2014	70	1.17

The graph below shows the sharply increasing market share of imported chili in Shyambazar, at an exponential growth rate of 194 percent!

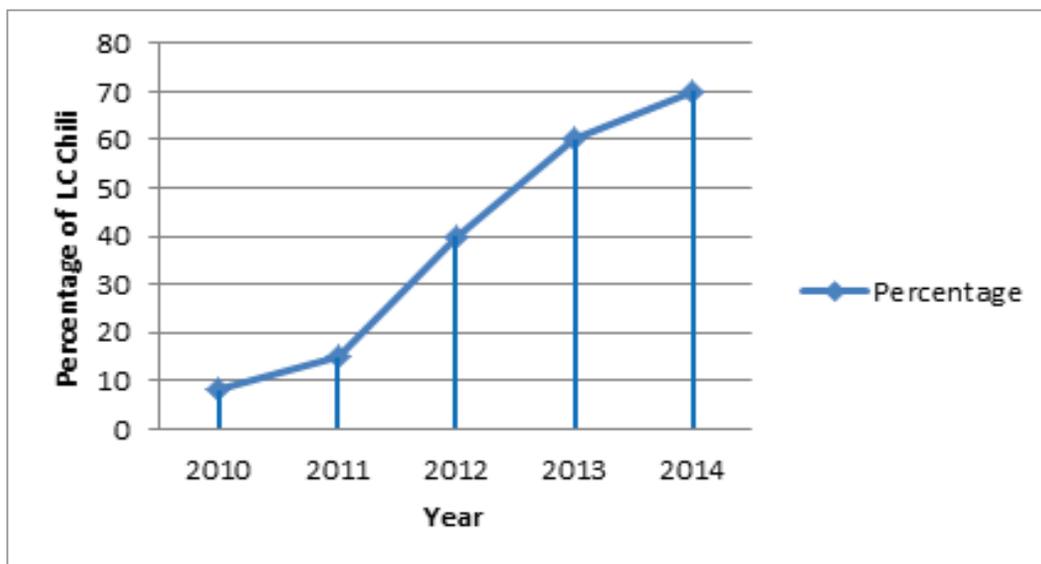


Figure 2: Growth rate of imported chili in Shyambazar

Price Comparison

Table 8 presents the market price of dry chili in Shyambazar on a particular date (22 June, 2014). The price indicates that an Indian variety – Indian Mota has a sales price of BDT 107-110 per KG whereas a similar variety to Indian Mota, Shariatpur, has a sales price of BDT 110-115. Better varieties than these like Batakandi or Panchagar are sold at much higher prices, BDT 128-130 and BDT 120-125 respectively.

Table 8: Price of dry chili by variety, 22 June 2014

Variety	Price per KG (in Taka)
Indian Teja	138- 150
Indian Mota	107- 110
Shariatpur	110- 115
Batakandi, Comilla	128- 130
Barisal	110- 112
Panchagar	120- 125

Table 9: Price comparison of dry chili, native vs. Indian in years

Varieties	Trade Price per KG dry chili (in BDT)		
	2012	2013	2014
Native	140- 160	150- 170	110- 130
Indian	105- 135	110- 150	105- 135

Despite the higher price of Indian chilies, the demand for Indian chili remains higher except during the March-June period which sees an increase in the business of native or local chili.

2.6 Scenario of Dry Chili Processors

A number of companies in the country are involved in processing agricultural products including dry chili. The companies are Square Consumer Products Ltd., PRAN Food Ltd, ACI Foods Limited, Partex Star Group, BD Foods Limited., Lalmai Food Products Ltd., ACME, Fresh and TATA. These companies process the dry chili into chili powder, package it in very attractive packets of different sizes and finally distribute the products under their own brand to the retailers through their distribution network all over the country.

Commercial processors have year-round demand for dry chilies. In Bangladesh, two of the leading spice-processing companies have a yearly dry chili demand of 3,000 MT each. They enjoy 81 percent of the total powder chili market. Thus, they have higher demand for dry chilies over other competitors.

Where are these chilies used?

Most spice companies use 100 percent procured dry chilies in producing chili powder. An exception has been found for one leading spice company that sells 5 percent of the dry chili intact, and 95 percent as chili powder.

How is the chili procured?

The procurement procedure of dry chili is not uniform for all the processing companies. Some procure dry chili as raw materials through their selected agents, who purchase from the farmers and local traders and perform some additional functions such as cleaning and sorting, before transporting the chili to the company location. Field studies revealed that one company's annual collection was about 3,000 MT of dry chili, supplied by preselected suppliers. Another company was found to have collected the same amount of chili from both contract suppliers (60%) and contract growers (40%).

Domination of Imported Chili

The scenario of using imported chilies by processing factories reflects the dominance of imported dry chilies in Bangladesh. The change in the proportion of use of dry chili as raw material is seen in Table 10. One leading processing firm collected 100% i.e. 3,000 MT of dry chili from the domestic market in 2012, while it imported 100% chili in 2013. The total shift to imported chili was attributed to the fall in domestic production and the consequent fall in the quality of domestic chili. In the current year, the firm has collected 40% of its raw material from domestic chili and 60% from imported chili.

Table 10: Share of native and imported chili by year

Year	Native chilies (In %)	Imported chilies (In %)	Total Procurement (In %)
2012	100	0	100
2013	0	100	100
2014	40	60	100

As chili powder follows a chemistry of mixing different grades or qualities of chili, in 2014, the company decided to use a 3:2 ratio while procuring imported and native chilies respectively, based on the quality and supply condition.

It also appeared that one of the processing companies was not interested in imported chili which is why it procured 40% from chili growers and 60% from the contract suppliers. There is apprehension that out of 60% supplied by contractors may include 10 -15% imported chili.

2.7 Conclusive Findings

Based on the above analysis, it may be concluded that there is lack of adequate information on the production and demand position of dry chili in the country. However, on the basis of the available information, it seems that imported chili makes up more than 50% of the total market supply. Though Bangladesh is considered to be one of the two most unstable markets for Indian chili (Krishnadas and Mundinaman, 2011), the demand for Indian chili over domestic produce continues due to better quality.

The key conclusive findings are-

- a) The demand for dry chili in the domestic market is increasing, while the production of dry chili is decreasing with of the fall in production area.
- b) The share of LC chili in every market – local haats, regional markets, terminal markets, processing markets and the national economy— is increasing.
- c) The demand for imported chili is higher in spite of its high price. This is due to quality consciousness toward dry chili. The snowball effect of imported chili in the national market started in 2012, following major crop failure due to natural calamities. The effect has not diminished since then.

2.8 Factors Affecting Imported Chili

2.8.1 Fundamental Factors

Liberal trade and agricultural policies: Bangladesh initiated a liberalized process moderately from 1980 and more rapidly and widely from the 1990's (Ahmed and Sattar, 2004). They found that, from 1972-2000, the trade liberalization and economic reform contributed to the growth of output, per capita income growth, and reduced poverty.

There was slow progress in trade liberalization only in the 1980s, particularly with respect to reductions in import tariffs (Bakht 2001b). However, some liberalization of agricultural exports did occur: export duties on raw jute and tea were withdrawn in 1981, and those on dried fruits, fresh fruits, oil cakes, coriander seed, dry chili, dry ginger, black pepper, turmeric, tobacco, vegetables and potato were withdrawn in 1986.

Trade liberalization policy in 1990 opened up the opportunity for the Bangladesh economy to enhance economic growth and foster overall development, since openness can have a positive effect on economic growth, exports, imports, FDI and remittance of the country (Manni and Afzal, 2012).

Trade liberalization in the early 1990s brought tariff rates down sharply as well, with total protective import duty rates (both customs duties and para tariffs) declining from 74 percent (unweighted average off all tariff lines) in 1991 to only 32 percent in 1995. Likewise, import tariffs and total tax incidence on the import of major agricultural commodities declined sharply.

According to Export policy 2012-2015, 10 sectors have been identified as Highest Priority Sectors. The government regularly modifies the list and provides special privileges to the export of these products

(GOB, 2012). The first sector is agro-products and agro-processed products. Dry chili and chili powder can be included in this group.

Other reformed areas in addition to import liberalization are the privatization of input distribution, withdrawal of input and food subsidies and a broadening of the scope of private investment in agriculture. All of these liberalization steps make the importation of dry chili more convenient.

Less attention of government toward spice sector: As a developing country with meager natural resources, Bangladesh has to prioritise its attentions toward the crop sectors. Considering food and nutrition security, income growth, poverty alleviation and sustainability, the GoB has given priority to Rice, Wheat, Maize, Jute, Cotton, Tea and Sugarcane. Horticultural crops like Potato, Sweet potato, Pulses and Oilseeds are also in key consideration for development.

Spice has been considered as a medium prioritized sector for crop diversification; however, strengthening of the agricultural research and extension systems in order to develop new technologies relating to spice crop varieties, integrated farming systems, organic farming, improved agronomic and agro-processing technologies, and diffusion of the proven technologies are limited in this sector. Moreover, Chili as a major spice has not been able to attract adequate attention for public and private sector initiatives.

2.8.2 Technical Factors

Quality comparison: The key technical reason that contributes to the presence and increase of imported dry chilies is the quality dimension. Comparing the quality of native chilies and imported chilies, consumers and processors of dry chilies reported that imported chilies are of superior quality. Table 11 presents a comparison of the features of native chili and imported chili.

Table 11: Quality comparison of native and imported dry chili

Point of Comparison	Native Chilies	Imported Chilies
Color	Less reddish	More reddish
Heat	Low	High
Spiciness/Flavor	Medium	High
Taste	High	Medium
Size	Small to medium	Long
Shape	Good shape	Better shape

Field Findings, "A Study on Dry Chili Market in Bangladesh: Present Challenges and Opportunities", GMark Consulting Ltd., July 2014

Cultivation and processing techniques: It has been reported that the cultivation techniques followed by Indian farmers are more appropriate than those used by Bangladeshi farmers, which gives them the competitive advantage in producing superior qualities of chili. Some differences in cultivation practices are: Bangladeshi farmers apply excessive fertilizers, pesticides and irrigation. For example they use 20 kg urea hoping for better production, where only 10 kg of urea is sufficient. An overdose of fertilizer lowers the quality of the yield and affects soil health.

During the post-harvest processing, Indian chilies are dried in a controlled atmosphere. Typically oven-dried at controlled temperatures, the Indian chilies achieve the perfect toast. In Bangladesh, chilies are sun-dried in open spaces; sun-drying makes chilies more fragile and creates scope for the mixture of foreign particles.

Demand from processors: Chili processors reported that native chilies are highly exposed to fungus during the grinding, while imported chilies have fewer fungus problems. Therefore, processors are reluctant to purchase local chilies.

2.9 Problem Illustrations

The problems as perceived by different actors in connection with cultivation and marketing practices of dry chili are summarized in Table 12:

Table 12: Problems as perceived by various stakeholders

Stakeholders/ Actors	Problems
Seed companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chili seed business less viable • Seed extraction and preservation of seed is complex • Easy to trade imported seed • Imported seed is costly so market is thin • No relationship with other research organizations
BSRI, BARI	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited dissemination services for 3 BARI -released varieties of chili • Lack of knowledge of production and post -harvest operation • Cultivable land is decreasing • No interaction with other related organizations
Processing company	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local variety is not adequate or regular in supply to meet the company's requirement • Local variety is not up to mark in terms of quality requirements • Poor harvesting and post -harvesting operations might reduce quality
Exporter - Importer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of data on requirements of dry chili in domestic market • No reliable current data on the total production of dry chili in the country • Export -import is done based only on personal experience
Trader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of organized source of information • Lack of awareness about the quality specifications of the various varieties of chili • Poor storage system, no grading system • Price is set by the large traders • Lack of working capital • Lack of business training
Chili grower	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of traditional practices including cultivation, harvesting and post -harvest operation • Use of local and poor quality seed • Overuse of input material • Selling of product without the right market information • Uncertain market of dry chili • Lack of capital • Lack of good quality seed and technical support

SECTION THREE: POLICIES, PRACTICES AND IMPACTS

To this point, it is clear that importation of dry chili in Bangladesh is due to the trade liberalization; this demands further analysis of policy issues related to the chili trade. Liberal trade is generally seen as a positive practice toward globalization. However, critics do not advocate the openness of trade and finance in some situations, especially considering the inequality present in the global economy.

This section of the report seeks to compile evidence and results of greater trade openness and associated regulations and deregulations affecting the country's dry chili markets.

3.1 Importation of chilies – rules and regulations

The import policy does not include special treatment of chili or spices. Assuming that the general rules and procedures are applicable to chili import, some features of the Import Policy Order 2012-2015 are presented below:

According to the Import Policy Order, all items will be imported except the banned items which are listed in Annexure-1 of Import Policy Order 2012- 2015. Chili is not included in banned items. As there are no clear rules for chili, it seems general procedures and rules will be applicable for it.

- Correct use of H.S code¹ number to get L.C. Authorization for or open L/C.
- Imports shall be made at the most competitive rate and it is obligatory for the importers, at any time, to submit documents to Import Control Authority regarding the price paid or to be paid by them.
- In all cases of import, “country of origin” shall be mentioned clearly on the package and container of goods.
- A certificate of origin issued by the concerned authority of the exporting country must be submitted along with import documents to the custom authority at the time of release of goods.
- With exception of some selected imports, the name, address and TIN of the Importer shall be inscribed or printed in indelible ink on at least two percent of the largest packet/cover/tinned package.
- Source of finance may be cash or other Special Trading Arrangements (STA).

The valuation method for imported goods is CIF (Cost, Insurance and Freight), which means that the import duty and taxes payable are calculated on the complete shipping value, which includes the cost of the imported goods, the cost of freight, and the cost of insurance. In addition to duty, imports are also subject to VAT, Supplementary Duty, Regulatory Duty, Advance Trade VAT, and Advance Income Tax.

¹ HS Code stands for Harmonized Commodity Description and Coding System. It comprises about 5,000 commodity groups; each identified by a six digit code, arranged in a legal and logical structure, as a basis for their Customs tariffs and for the collection of international trade statistics.

There is no minimum threshold in Bangladesh. Therefore, duties and taxes are levied on all imports regardless of their value. This include levies imposed for revenue or protection purposes and determined on a specific or ad valorem basis.

Other taxes and custom fees

- Supplementary duty is applicable on certain products at rates between 0% and 500% calculated on the sum of the CIF value and corresponding duty.
- Regulatory duty is applicable on certain products at 5% calculated on the sum of the CIF value, the corresponding duty, and the supplementary duty if applicable.
- Advance Trade VAT is applicable at 4% calculated on the sum of the CIF value and corresponding duty.
- Advance Income Tax is applicable at 5% calculated on the sum of the CIF value and corresponding duty.

3.2 Chili Export from Bangladesh

According to the Export Policy 2012-2015, 10 sectors are identified as Highest Priority Sectors. The government regularly modifies the list and provides special privileges for the export of these products (GOB, 2012). The first one is agro-products and agro-processed products. Dry chili and chili powder can be included in this group. There is no special treatment for chili or spices. The general rules and procedures of the policy are applicable to chili export.

According to the Export Policy 2012-2015, all items will be exported except the banned items which are listed in Annexure-1 of Export policy 2012- 2015. Chili is not listed as a banned item.

Agricultural products face enormous non-tariff barriers compared to non-agricultural products. In practice, exporters do not have options other than to comply with the Sanitary and Phytosanitary (SPS) and Agreement on Technical Barriers to Trade (TBT) (Khan, 2011).

Special transportation arrangements will be made in domestic water, railway, and road ways for the agro-products and agro-processing products. Some facilities will be provided to agricultural commodities under the other items, but not for chilies.

Dry chilies are exported in a small amount under the category of “agro and agro-processing products” as a vegetable item. Therefore, no segregated data is recorded for dry chili exports.

3.3 Other Policies and Practices

Bangladesh-India Bilateral FTA

- a) Protective vs. unprotected import policies:** In general, India’s import policies for agricultural products have been and remain much more protective than its industrial protection policies; in their present form they preclude substantial Indian imports from Bangladesh or from any other country. Bangladesh has no such preventive policies for agricultural products; the provision encourages importers to rely on foreign agro products.

The domestic agricultural trade liberalization has led to increased imports of agricultural products and this could result in the contraction of the country's agriculture. This may lead to higher possibilities of a large loss of employment for unskilled labor in the near future.

- b) **Informal and illegal trade:** Since Bangladesh's independence, there has been a substantial informal unrecorded trade across the India-Bangladesh land borders. Much of this trade is quasi-legal and is best characterized as "informal" rather than illegal, because there is wide participation by local people in the border areas, and the trade generally bypasses Customs posts. At the other extreme there is trade which goes in larger quantities-mostly by truck-through the formal legal Customs and other channels, but which involves explicitly illegal practices such as under-invoicing, misclassification and bribery of Customs and other officials.

The **"technical smuggling"** provides the options of avoiding tax, custom duty and regulatory duty, which results in the lower price of Indian Chili and other commodities. This adulterates the local production of dry chilies as well as the price of native varieties.

Seed Sector Policies and Practices

National Seed Policy emphasizes on local enterprise and the private sector to be encouraged and promoted in production, distribution of improved varieties of seed. It is of great concern that Bangladesh does not have any local seed varieties from the private sector being used for dry chili production purposes. Retained seeds are the prime source in villages for chili production and processing.

The business of seed breeding, multiplication, production processing, import and marketing should be declared as an agro-based industry under the Industrial Investment Schedule to make such companies eligible for various incentives, supports and concessions. The BADC-Seed Wing should be authorized to purify and maintain local varieties for which there is substantial and steady demand.

Varietal development of dry chili is also emphasized in article 11.5.1 (National Agricultural Research System) of the National Seed Policy. Private sector seeds men will be granted access to storage space, drying floors, dryers, cleaning equipment, and related equipment and facilities that are in excess of BADC-Seed Wing needs. Access will be through custom services, lease, or lease-purchase arrangements.

Technical assistance, training and services from BADC-Seeds Wing, DAE, Research Institutes, NSTL, SCA and other public sector units involved in the seeds industry will be made available to private sector seeds men on request for a reasonable fee in connection with services such as seed testing, certification and inspection.

However, regardless of the well-documented policies and incentives, private seed companies have no further response or implication to releasing high-input responsive dry chili seeds. There is also negligible collaboration between BADC and other national research firms with private seed companies regarding releasing high yielding dry chili seeds.

Bangladesh Bank's Initiatives

Bangladesh Bank has Agricultural/Rural Credit Guidelines and Program which disburse credit for food grains and crops. No direct provision for the chili sector exists; nonetheless chili is considered as a

generic crop under the agricultural credit program. Recent reformation in the program has made adequate allocation for fisheries, livestock and agro-supporting sectors.

To facilitate export, Bangladesh Bank has recently made some reforms in their foreign exchange policy. Previously, exporters were required to submit Proceed Realization Certificates (PRCs) to different government agencies as evidence of export and realization of proceeds. However, this requirement of authentication by Bangladesh Bank was withdrawn with effect from July 01, 2009².

To encourage export trade of the country, BB has declared cash incentives or export subsidies for agro and agro processing commodities at a rate of 20 percent. As chilies (dry and green) are considered as generic agro and agro processing commodities, this subsidy is also valid for chilies.

Despite the flexible initiatives of BB, Bangladesh cannot compete with chili products in global market due to lack of quality compliance demanded by the international importers of dry chili.

Less Focus on New Forms of Agricultural Production and Marketing

Individualistic production systems are becoming economically and technically unfeasible for an increasingly large number of small and marginal farmers due to rapid decline in the average farm size. An increase in the number of farms vis-à-vis rapid loss of cultivable land has been observed, but there are no reflections on the emerging new forms of farming e.g. contract farming by the private sector. Some high value products like poultry, vegetables, aromatic rice and dairy have started growing under contract farming systems in a small scale, though chilies have yet not demonstrated significant achievement under the contract farming model.

3.4 Macro Level Impacts

Chili is the most important and widely grown crop among the spices and condiments in Bangladesh. An average chili farmer can grow 8 mounds of dry chili in his or her 33 decimal of lands and make a profit of around BDT 20,000 from the harvest, taking into account the constraints of poor cultivation & post-harvest technique, climatic shocks and low yield.

Imagine 2016!

If the importation of dry chili continues, consider the scenario of Shyambazar. The import trend gives an indication that by 2016, Shyambazar chili market will be dominated solely by imported Chili.

Table 13: Trend analysis and forecasting of imported chili

Year	Percentage
2010	8
2011	15
2012	40
2013	60
2014	70
2015	85
2016	107.5

The consequences will be that the farmers in major chili growing regions connected with Shyambazar like Comilla, Faridpur, Barisal, Shariatpur will have no interest in growing chili anymore.

The domination of imported chilies in processing factories is ever increasing. Processing firms are procuring imported and native chilies at a 3:2 ratio respectively, based on the quality and supply condition. Demand for imported dry chilies at the processors' end has been rising since 2012, showing a steady rate in recent months. However, there is no sign of a decline in processors' interest in purchasing imported chili in the near future.

Farmers' Shift from Chili Cultivation

Bangladesh is cultivating chilies (green and dry) on 355,673 acres of land in both the Rabi and Kharif seasons; production is about 205,108 MT. As stated in the earlier section, nearly 440,000 farmers are directly involved in chili cultivation, harvesting and processing. Chili covers almost two-thirds (64 percent) of the total income/earning of a farmer from his or her agro product cultivation. It is not surprising that the continuous trend of chili import will discourage farmers to grow chili any longer and as their annual income will decrease. They will be compelled to adopt alternative crops which may not be as profitable as chili.

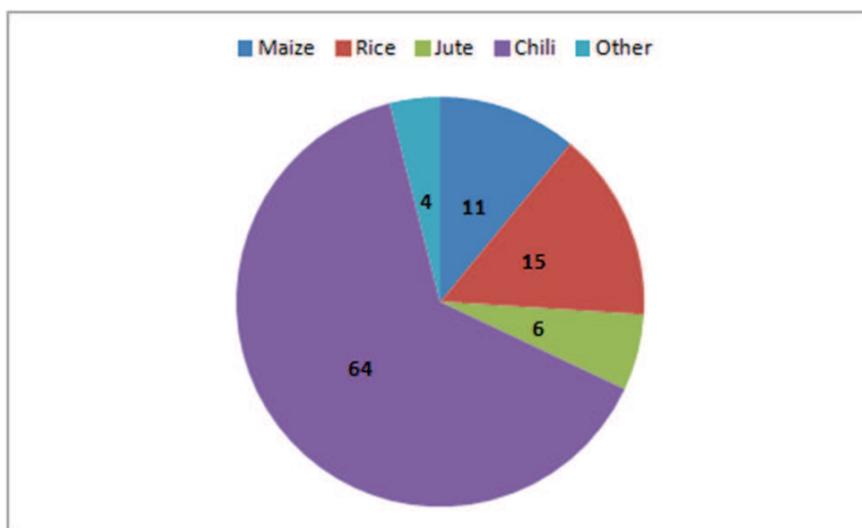


Figure 3: Chili in a farmers' income portfolio

At its worst, this situation will cause the annual income of the very poor farmers or the poorest of the poor to suddenly diminish and push these families into greater poverty.

Potential Failure of Development Programs/Initiatives

Microcredit programs of many local and national NGOs target the poorest section of the economic community; they provide farmers with credit to give them a chance to survive and sustain themselves economically and socially. The trend of taking seasonal agricultural loans for cultivation has been increasing since 2006. This was particularly observable when a number of multi-donor chili sector development projects were taken by the government in the largest chili growing hub – the northern chars of Bangladesh. These development initiatives have successfully attracted and improved the lives and livelihoods of chili growers in the northern part of the country and made an example throughout the nation, establishing chili cultivation as a successful poverty reduction activity in the country. If the

situation of imported chili prevails, the greatest defeat will be for these groups of farmers who have invested much to become specialized chili growers, only to lose a good market in which to sell their products. This will cause a chain reaction - these farmers who make chili their source of repayment will fail to earn enough and repay their loans. This burden will fall onto their other sources of income with increased pressure of earning and repayment. Unable to increase income from other available sources, the farmers will not be able to get more returns from this MF product.

Decline in National Economic Growth

Last but not the least; the national economy will suddenly experience a catastrophe. The encroachment of import chili in the market will cause failure of around BDT 786 million in the seed business, BDT 2,405 million in the fertilizer businesses, BDT 786 million in the pesticide businesses and BDT 2,122 million in the irrigation businesses. In addition, the income of local transport providers associated with local dry chili shipping will drop by around BDT 424 million.

The negative impact of imported chili will also include a fall in the local government's earnings from haat/market leasing. This sector is currently earning around BDT 943 million a year, contributing to national revenue and GDP.

2013 Onion Crisis

From early July through August, 2013, the market prices of onion rose dramatically in Bangladesh. Despite the domestic onion's profitability and production growth at an annual rate of 7.3 percent between 2004/05 and 2011/12, imports from India dominate the market in Bangladesh. In 2011–2012, imported onions constituted about one-fourth of the estimated 1.3 million metric tons of total onion availability. They accounted for nearly 60 percent of the average total onion stock at wholesale markets in Dhaka city, the main consumption center of the country.

With India in the midst of its own onion-price crisis followed by the fall in onion production by 5.0 to 15 per cent in some of India's high production states like Maharashtra due to poor or erratic rains, Bangladeshi traders took advantage of the decrease in imports by hoarding any available onions to make extra profits. The scarcity brought about a price surge. The governments in this part of the world took a long time to respond to such casualties and by the time they had come up with official versions of the matter, the damage had already been caused, in some cases to a grievous extent.

The scenario may be the future of our studied sector – that of dry chili. Current market trends of imported dry chili indicates that the event of 2013 onion crisis might occur again if proper priorities are not set and interventions are not taken immediately.

SECTION FOUR: SUGGESTIONS AND WAY FORWARD

4.1. Suggestion Matrix from Different Stakeholders

During the field survey the different stakeholders were requested to make some suggestions to overcome the problems and improve the domestic dry chili market. The suggestions from those perspectives have been summarized in Table 14.

Table 14: Key suggestions by stakeholders

Stakeholders	Key Suggestions
Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To ensure the market with remunerative prices ▪ To arrange training on appropriate technology ▪ To ensure availability of technological and market information ▪ To arrange institutional credit for chili production
Traders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dissemination of market information ▪ Training program for traders on quality specification and handling of product ▪ Introduction of storage and grading system of chili ▪ Formation of traders' organization to face both buyers and sellers ▪ Arrangement of institutional credit
Seed Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Maintenance of present share in the market
Processing Companies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ To improve quality of chili to match the requirement of processing companies ▪ To ensure regular supply of dry chili in adequate amount ▪ To train farmers on harvesting and post-harvest operation
Govt. Research Institutes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Dissemination of BARI-released chili varieties ▪ Training of farmers on production and post-harvest operation, ▪ Exploration of Char and coastal land for chili production
Sector Experts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Development of new high yielding varieties ▪ Dissemination of information among the target farmers ▪ Technological support for harvest and post-harvest management ▪ Introduction of Contract farming ▪ Optimum use of input (seeds, fertilizers, insecticides) to help reduce cost of production, increase yield and soil health. ▪ Development of strong links between research institute, farmers, DAE and processing companies. ▪ Investigations into the feasible adoption of Indian varieties of chili

4.2. Key Recommendations

- Bangladesh's dependency on India as the only source of dry chili imports makes the country vulnerable. The government needs to reduce dependency on Indian chili by taking steps to increase domestic chili production.
- The government should review its import policies of agricultural products and find ways to make them more protective. This includes increasing effective trade barriers – tariff and non-tariff - on the importation of dry and powder chili.
- Effective measures need to be taken to restrict informal and illegal import of dry chili coming through land ports and borders.
- Good/improved quality/varieties of chili seed need to be made available to reduce dependency on imports.
- Improved technology needs to be accessible to reduce cost of chili production and marketing.
- Chili growers need to be trained and motivated to adopt good/improved varieties and better technology to raise the quality of their farm produce.
- The chili sector needs to be moved up from medium priority to high priority.
- The quality of information available on chili production, import-export, and demand-supply and minimize its delivery time needs to be improved to help policy formulation and decision-making.
- Contract farming systems should be encouraged as they may help both the processing companies and the chili producers to increase and match the demand-supply situation of dry chili.

4.2.1 Proposed Interventions

Interventions should be made at the following levels -

- Reform trade barriers and trade policies.
- Development of new varieties at research institutes.
- Popularize the newly released varieties by BARI among the potential chili growers and motivation of farmers.
- Selection of best variety from the existing available varieties in the country.
- Possibility and feasibility of some of the Indian variety should be explored.
- Diagnosis should be made geographical area wise.
- Marketing functions in dry chili marketing.

4.2.2 Proposed Activities

- Review trade barriers and trade policies.
- Research program for the development of new varieties.
- Investigate the possibility of adoption of Indian varieties.
- Select best chilies from the available varieties
- Provide training on related aspects such as harvesting techniques, storage, grading, drying, transportation, container type, packaging and safe production.

4.2.3 Responsible Public and Private Agencies

- o Officials of the Ministry of Commerce (MoC), Export Promotion Bureau (EPB), Bangladesh Tariff Commission (BTC) and National Board of Revenue (NBR)
- o Scientists of Bangladesh Spices Research Centre (BSRC), Bangladesh Agricultural research Institute (BARI) , Agricultural Universities,
- o BARI, Bangladesh Spices Research Centre (BSRC) , NGOs, BAU and DAE
- o Processing companies and farmers should come forward for the production of quality chili and to ensure remunerative prices and a guaranteed market for the producers.

4.3. Conclusive Remarks

The development of an industry based on imported raw materials is not a wise and realistic decision and the rapidly growing processing companies in Bangladesh should not depend completely on imported dry chili for their domestic and export markets. The country should take measures to attain self-sufficiency or to increase production to the highest level through optimum utilization of resources.

Chili is considered to be one of the major spices and high value crops. There is scope for exporting vegetables including chili by adopting production and export-related support measures. The export of chili will increase the farmer's income, generate employment and enhance women's empowerment and increase social development in the country.

More attention should be given to the prioritizing the chili market, and determining how to approach the sequential improvement of constraints, rather than simply listing and attempting to address them on an ad hoc basis.

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RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS: CLP'S MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH TO PROMOTING LIVELIHOODS AND REDUCING POVERTY IN THE CHARS



RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS: CLP'S MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH TO PROMOTING LIVELIHOODS AND REDUCING POVERTY IN THE CHARS

Author: **Stuart Kenward**; Innovation, Monitoring
Learning and Communications (IMLC) Director, Chars Livelihoods Programme
Co-Authors: **Matthew Pritchard**; Team Leader, Chars Livelihoods Programme
Maksud Hannan; IMLC Unit Manager, Chars Livelihoods Programme

Abstract

The Chars Livelihoods Programme works with extreme poor households who live on island chars (sand islands) in the North-West of Bangladesh. The Programme covers a vast area (currently 10 Districts) in three of the country's largest rivers; the Jamuna, Padma, and the Teesta.

Hundreds of thousands of people live in the chars in the ten districts where CLP operates. CLP data show that between 30-40% of these households are extreme poor i.e. they meet the Programme's selection criteria of being assetless, landless and jobless.

Extreme poor households living in the chars rely largely on selling agricultural labour to char landowners. The supply and demand for labour can however be erratic, for example during the lean season (September to December) resulting in a potential loss of income for the family. An alternative is for the male head to migrate to urban centres such as Dhaka where they sell their labour as rickshaw pullers, in the brick fields etc.

Admittedly some chars are just a short boat journey to the mainland. The majority of chars are however remote, requiring long and sometime dangerous boat journeys to reach. Because of this, char households have relatively limited access to services such as clinics, schools, extension services and safety nets.

Recognising these constraints, the CLP offers a comprehensive package of support to 78,000 households (equivalent to approximately 0.3 million people) that meet the programme's selection criteria. The support aims to promote and protect livelihoods whilst at the same time trying to prevent households slipping back into poverty.

The CLP core package is provided to participants for 18 months. The cornerstone of the programme is the provision of an asset that can generate an income. Households are able to use the initial asset to gradually accumulate further income-generating assets, typically livestock and land. These provide diversified incomes for participants, decrease their reliance on wage labour, and provide greater resilience to shocks.

The CLP package also addresses a wider range of issues, such as water and sanitation, health and nutrition, village savings and loans, raising awareness on social issues such as dowry and early marriage, flood protection and access to market development services.

Considering the difficult environment in which char households live, the Programme is achieving some impressive results. According to survey results, 85% of CPHHs are graduating (meeting six of the ten graduation criteria.) There is evidence to suggest these rates of graduation are sustainable. On the whole households are accumulating productive assets well in excess of what they had when they joined the Programme. As one might expect though, not all CPHHs succeed (based on the value of their productive assets). This is down to a range of issues such as poor investment decisions but also the harsh environment in which char households live. The Programme is also seeing impressive gains in terms of empowering women, food security and WASH.

The Programme has a comprehensive monitoring and evaluation system which has evolved over the last ten years. The system, managed by the Innovation, Monitoring, Learning and Communications Division provides reliable information on impact and sustainability that is packaged around thematic areas including livelihoods, women's empowerment, nutrition, food security as well as water, sanitation and hygiene practices. The Programme also monitors and reports progress against a set of ten graduation criteria which address the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty. The graduation criteria are useful in that they tell management whether a household is likely to be on the right trajectory out of extreme poverty.

Paper

1. The Chars

Chars are low-lying riverine islands prone to flooding and erosion. Bangladesh's rivers are some of the largest in the world, up to five miles in width at the height of the monsoon months of June to October. Outside of these months, when the rivers are drier and the water levels reduce, the silt settles and contributes to the formation of islands, some small, others several kilometres wide. Traditionally, these islands were used for cattle grazing, but people eventually settled on them, pushed off the mainland by population growth. This is a recent phenomenon stretching back only forty to fifty years.

With the annual risk of flooding and erosion, life on the chars is extremely precarious. This vulnerability is further intensified by the remoteness of many of the islands and the absence of public services and amenities. Yet the chars are home to sizeable numbers of extreme poor households. Between 30–40% of the population meet CLP's entry criteria, proxies for extreme poverty.

Escaping the cycle of poverty is especially difficult in the char context. Households not only need to withstand the environmental challenges, they also have to carve out a livelihood in a place where access to markets is difficult. Buying inputs for agriculture or selling agricultural produce can be difficult, usually requiring movement on boats to the mainland or larger, nearby chars. Most people who live on the chars, therefore, resort to agricultural day labour as their primary source of income.

The close link between life on the chars and seasonality extends beyond exposure to flooding. The poorest households are also vulnerable during the annual monga (hunger) season, which occurs during a period of seasonal underemployment between the planting and harvesting of the rice crop between September and December. Adult males tend to migrate to urban areas in search of work during this period. They can be away from their families for long periods of time, which is far from ideal considering the extreme vulnerability of life on the chars.

2. The Chars Livelihoods Programme

The UK Department for International Development (DFID) launched the CLP in 2004 (now co-financed by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia). It is managed by Maxwell Stamp PLC and Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives (LGRD & C), and executed by the Rural Development and Cooperative Division (RDGD), Ministry of LGRD&C, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. The Programme seeks to address some of the vulnerabilities that shape and define livelihoods on the chars, such as flooding and access to markets. The CLP also seeks to strengthen and diversify livelihoods so there is a lower reliance on wage labour. In addition to the provision of a significant income generating asset, CLP provides interventions to participants aimed at promoting livelihoods' development, such as livestock training and a monthly stipend for the full 18 months. These are coupled with further interventions that protect and transform participants' livelihoods, as well as preventing livelihood insecurity.

During the second phase of CLP (2010-2016), 78,000 CPHHs (equivalent to approximately 0.3 million people) will receive an integrated package of support over an 18 month period. The Programme also implements a number of projects that benefit the wider community. Whilst all are worthy of mention, perhaps the projects for which CLP is most well-known comprise:

Asset Transfer: The asset transfer project is a central component of CLP's support, in which each participant can invest Tk 17,500 in a livelihood-generating asset. CLP does not restrict their choice, other than stipulating that it must be potentially income-generating. About 98% of participants choose to invest in cattle; with 52% purchasing bulls and 46% purchasing heifers. A small proportion of participants choose to invest in land leases, sewing machines, or other small businesses.

Social Development: Social Development Groups (SDGs) are formed with all core participants. Regular weekly meetings are conducted with all SDGs for a period of 18 months. Subjects such as water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH), health & family planning, nutrition and disaster preparedness are all covered, among others.

Infrastructure: CLP raises participants' houses on earthen plinths above the highest known flood-level to protect households and their assets during floods. These plinths are built during the dry season creating an employment opportunity under CLP's Infrastructure Employment Project, at a time when there is little work available. The Programme also provides community-wide subsidies to install protected tube-wells and low-cost sanitary latrines.

Village Savings and Loans: CLP encourages the adoption of good savings habits through the Village Savings and Loan (VSL) project. VSL groups operate special community-based microfinance activities which aim to give chars-dwellers a safe place to save and borrow money.

3. Assessing achievements

CLP's Innovation, Monitoring, Learning and Communications Division (IMLC) is largely responsible for M&E and research which includes assessing progress towards high level results. The Programme aims to improve livelihoods and alleviate poverty on the chars. Assessing whether a household is out of poverty is a complex undertaking and simply assessing whether a household is above or below an income poverty line can oversimplify. IMLC therefore monitors progress against a range of indicators related to the multi-dimensional aspects of poverty. The indicators are grouped around six thematic areas, namely Livelihoods, Graduation, Food Security, Nutrition, Women's Empowerment and WASH.

The Programme aims to provide 78,000 extreme poor households with an integrated package of support lasting 18 months. Because not all of these households can be supported at the same time, six groups (called cohorts) receive the package through annual cohorts each averaging 13,000 core participant households (CPHHs).

IMLC collects the baseline status of households prior to them receiving CLP's support. This normally takes place during October each year. At the same time, data is collected from a panel sample of households from previous cohorts which allows the programme to show impact and whether outcomes/ impacts have been sustainable over time. The baseline status of each new cohort acts as the control group for all previous cohorts.

Table 1 shows the start and end data of each cohort, including the number of months between the end of CLP support and the October 2014 annual survey (from which data presented in this paper comes from).

Table 1: Cohort-wise Statistics

Cohort Number	Cohort Assistance Start Date	Cohort End Date	# of CPHHs	# months between end of assistance and October 2014 annual survey
2.1*	May '10	Dec. '11	5,004	34
2.2	Sept. '10	June '12	12,109	28
2.3	Sept. '11	June '13	17,435	16
2.4	Sept. '12	June '14	16,309	4
2.5	Sept. '13	June '15	13,579	Not applicable
2.6	Sept. '14	Feb. '16	13,564	Not applicable
			78,000	

* "2" denotes phase 2 of CLP. "1" denotes the first phase of CLP 2.

4. Improving Livelihoods and Alleviating Poverty – What’s the Evidence?

4.1. Strengthening and Diversifying Livelihoods

There is strong evidence that CLP is improving the livelihoods of many of the CPHHs it supports:

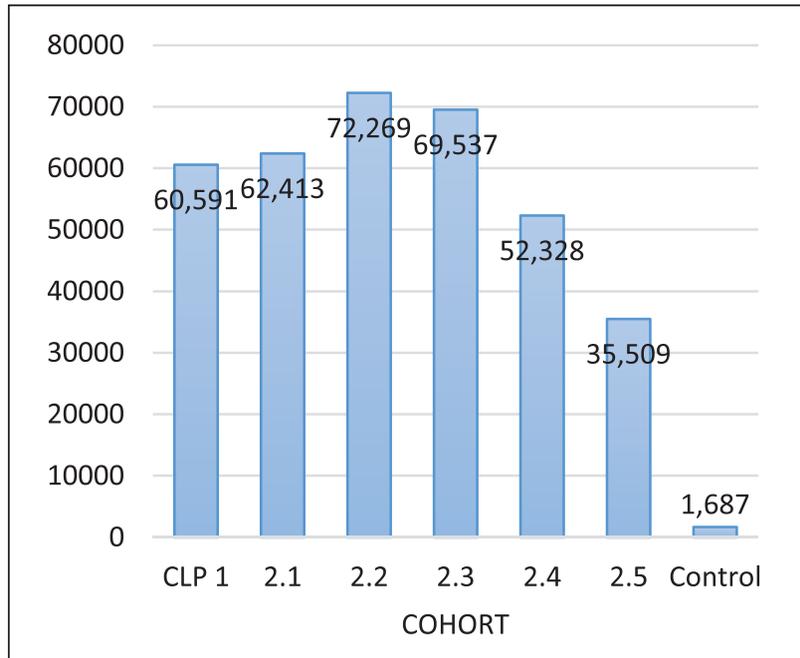
- On average, the value of productive assets held by CPHHs has increased (largely comprising livestock and land)
- Whilst still an important source of income, CPHHs are diversifying their income sources away from daily agricultural wage labour
- On average, household income and expenditure have increased above baseline
- On average, cash savings have increased

CLP has a significant positive impact on the value of household productive assets. As seen in Figure 1, for the control group (Cohort 2.6 at baseline), the average productive asset value is Tk. 1,687 (around £14¹). This increases substantially to an average of Tk. 52,328 (around £444) for households who completed the 18 month cycle of support 4 months prior to the October 2014 annual survey. This value continues to increase over time, with households from CLP’s earliest cohorts maintaining productive asset values of an average Tk. 60,591 (around £516).

The composition of these productive assets is predominantly land and livestock which clearly offer households with the opportunity to diversify their income sources and reduce risk. The 2014 survey shows that the proportion of income from agricultural and livestock produce increased from less than 2% in the control group to around 20-25% for earlier cohorts. Similarly, the proportion of income from wage labour decreased from around 75% in the control group to 37-49% for earlier cohorts.

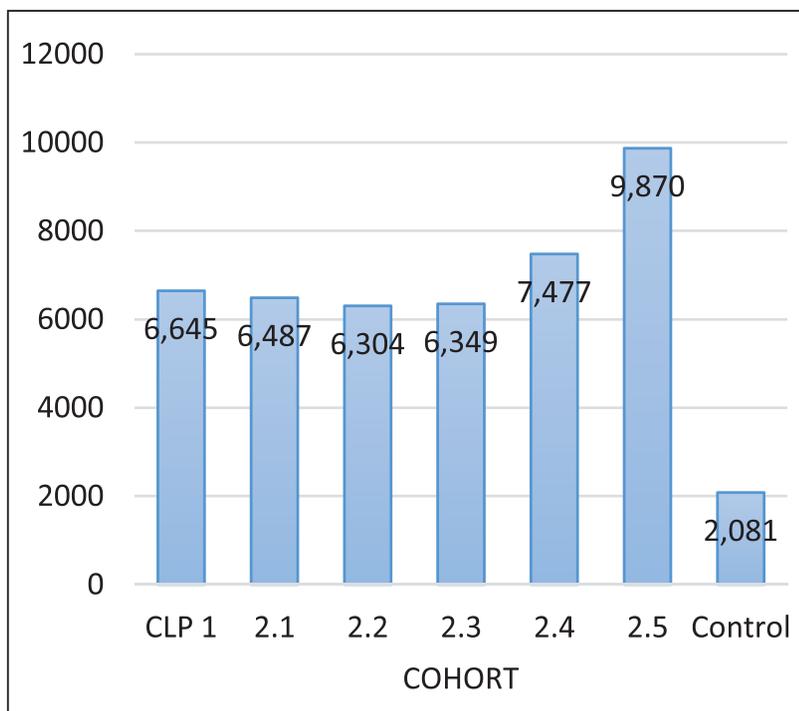
The Programme recognises there are methodological limitations with income and expenditure data. Households might not tell the truth, there are recall issues etc. Furthermore, there are methodological issues in comparing CLP data against a national poverty which likely uses a different approach to analysis and data collection.

Figure 1: Average value of household productive assets in BDT



Because extreme poor households on the chars rely heavily on wage labour as their main source of income, any change in the supply and / or demand for labour will impact a household's position above or below an income poverty line. This highlights the importance to CPHH of having diversified income sources.

Figure 2: Average monthly household income in BDT



Whilst there are limitations in measuring income and expenditure, CLP does monitor mean income and expenditure patterns over time and between cohorts. The Programme is seeing significant impacts on mean household income and expenditure. As illustrated in Figure 2, average monthly household income for the most recent cohort, 2.5, is higher (Tk. 9,870; around £84) than for households in the control group (Tk 2,081; around £18).

As is the case with household income, Figure 3 shows average household expenditure is much higher for households in CLP's most recent cohort (Cohort 2.5), averaging Tk. 7,445 (around £63) compared to households in the control group for whom the average monthly expenditure is Tk. 2,064 (around £17.5).

Figure 3: Average monthly household expenditure

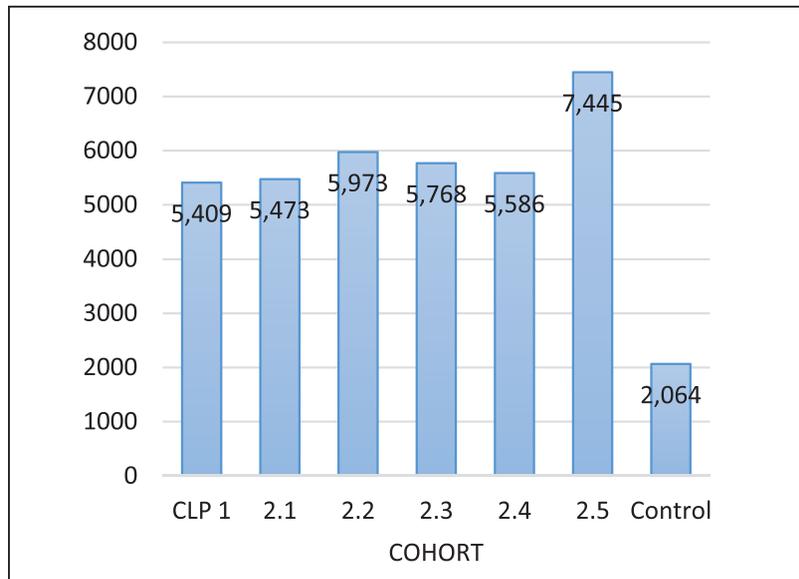
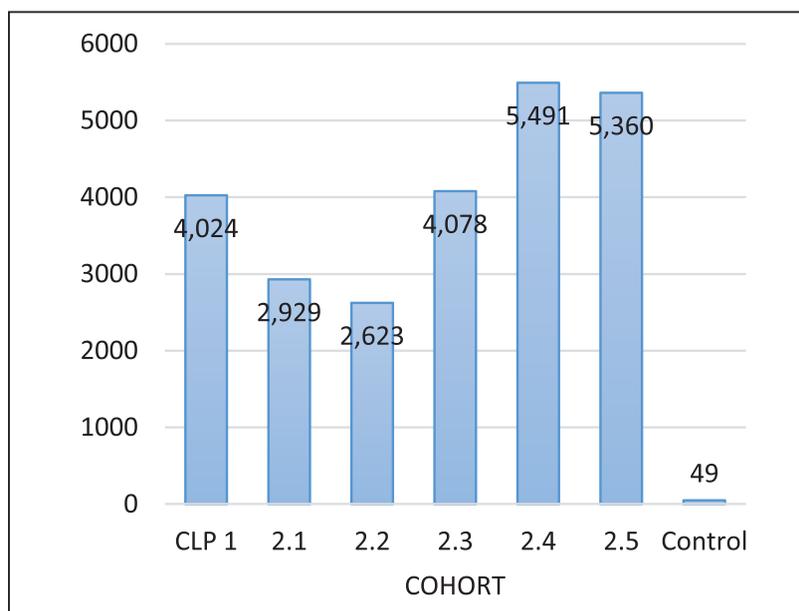


Figure 4: Average household monthly savings in BDT



The Programme also has a significant, positive impact on household cash savings. Comparing households in the control group (Cohort 2.6 at baseline) with those who had joined the Programme one year prior to the survey (Cohort 2.5), household cash savings increase significantly (Figure 4) from an average of Tk. 49 (around £0.41) to an average of Tk. 5,360 (around £46).

4.2. Not all households perform so well

In 2012, CLP's monitoring system found that, in terms of the value of their productive assets, some households were performing less well. Whilst still more than double the value of the assets they had at baseline, just over 20% of CPHHs supported during CLP1 had a productive asset base of less than Tk 10,000.

CLP commissioned research to understand the reason for this. It concluded that the main reasons for relative failure were as a result of natural causes and people-centred decisions. Natural causes were due to shocks that caused a loss of assets, such as flooding or river erosion. Person-centred causes were where it was the participant's decisions that caused the loss of their assets. These decisions included investing poorly, for example in businesses in which the participant had little knowledge. Paying dowries was another cause.

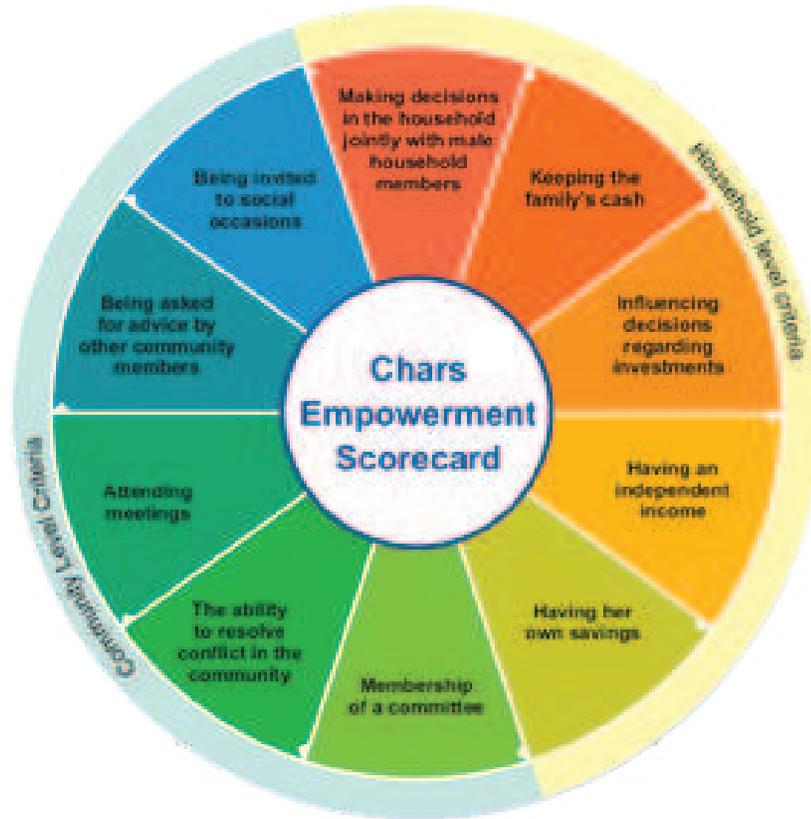
4.3. Empowering Core Participants

In 2012, to try to quantify the unquantifiable, the Programme, with support from char households, developed a Chars Empowerment Scorecard². The Scorecard comprises ten indicators that were developed through a series of focus group discussions with women and men, both young and old, poor and the relatively better-off, living on the chars. The indicators are context-specific. Women receive one point for each indicator they meet. Results from these indicators can then be aggregated into an 'empowerment score'. This empowerment score allows CLP to identify how empowered a woman is before she joins CLP, when she 'graduates' from CLP and how she progresses years later. If a woman achieves a score of five or more she is considered empowered. CLP has since undertaken a great deal of qualitative research to understand women's empowerment in the char context.

Indicators can be separated into those at the 'household-level' and at the 'community-level'. At the household-level, indicators refer to a woman's status within her home and the dynamics of power that exist between husband and wife. They also relate to the influence and control she has within the household. At the community-level, indicators relate to a woman's social status, including her participation and influence in the community, as well as the respect she receives from community members.

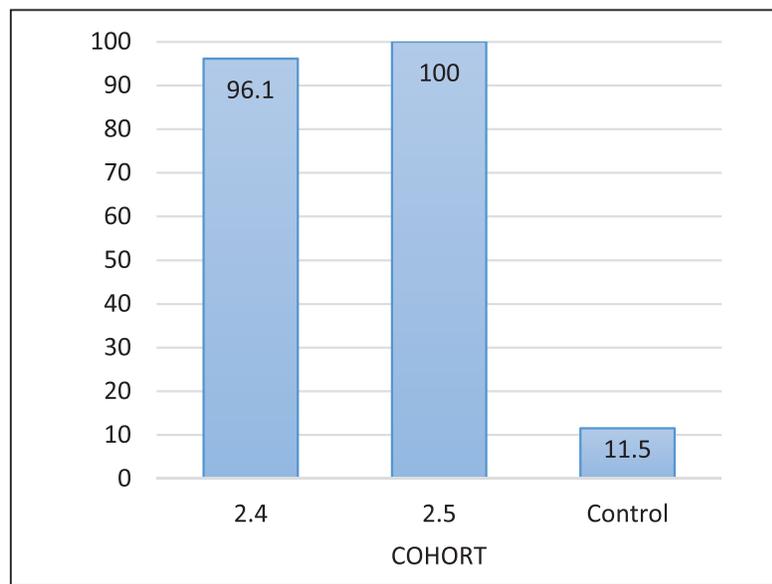
Results from the October 2014 annual survey (Figure 5) show that CLP has a large impact on women's empowerment. A total of 96.1% of women from Cohort 2.4 (for whom CLP support had ended 3 months prior to the survey) met five or more of CLP's empowerment criteria (and were therefore empowered hat

2 CLP (2012; Empowering Women in the Chars, The CLP's Contribution)



according to the Chars Empowerment Scorecard). This was substantially higher than the cohort who had joined CLP just one month before the survey. Only 11.5% of this group met (five of) the empowerment criteria, illustrating the significant, positive impact CLP support has on women's empowerment.

Figure 5:³ % of participants empowered (according to the empowerment scorecard)



³ Data for earlier cohorts still being analysed, as the Empowerment survey was carried out later than the others, in December 2014.

The criteria being met by the vast majority of CPHHs are:

- Being member of a committee
- Attending meetings
- Keeping family cash
- Joint decision-making

Empowerment criteria being met by relatively fewer households include:

- The ability to resolve conflict
- Being asked for advice
- Being invited to social occasions

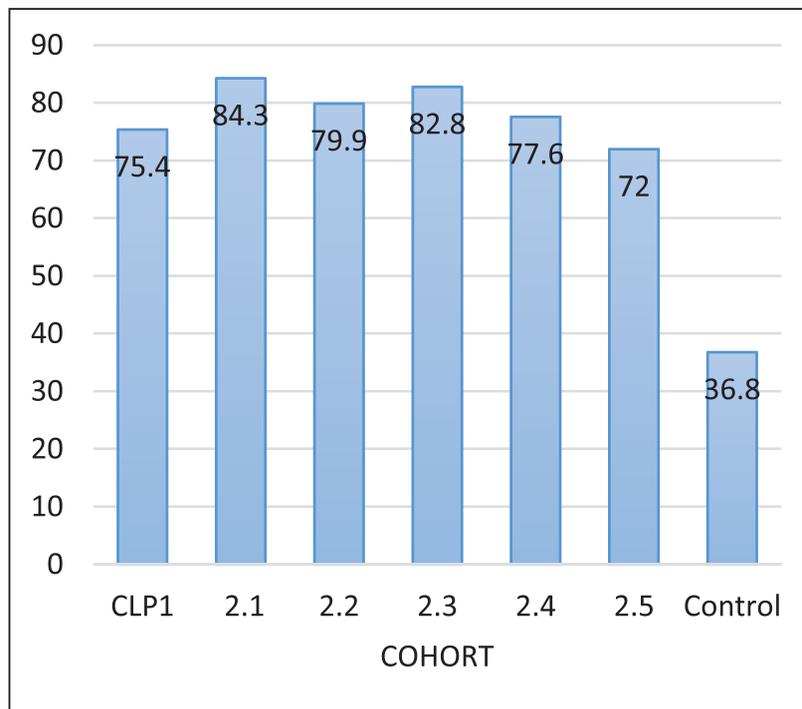
4.4. Improving Food Security

CLP defines food security under the following three pillars:

1. **Food Availability;** food must be available in sufficient quantities on a consistent basis.
2. **Food Access;** Households must be able to regularly acquire adequate amounts of food.
3. **Food Utilisation;** consumed food must have positive nutritional impact on people.

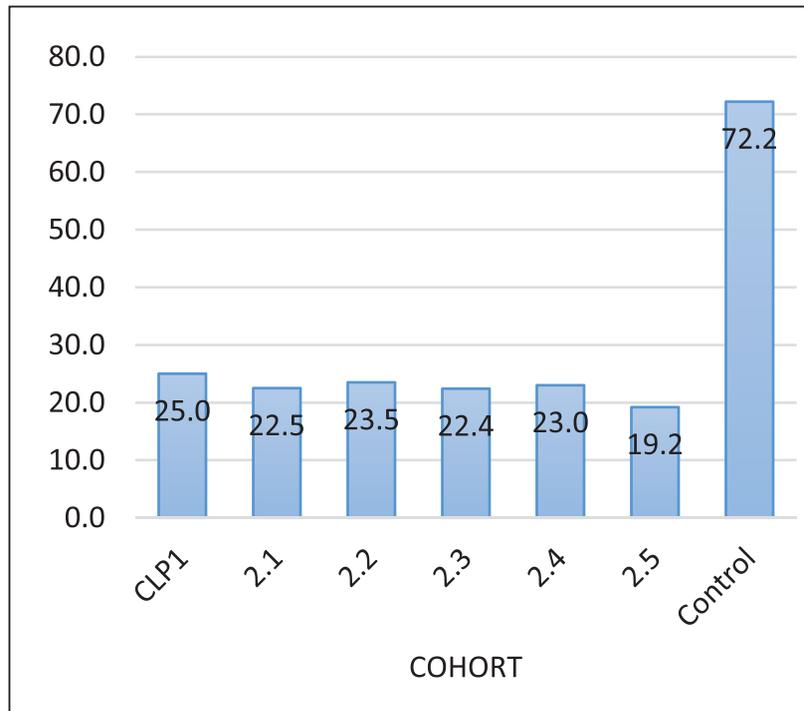
Figure 6 illustrates CLP's substantial impact on the number of meals a day that households eat as well as variation in diet. Just 37% of the control group met this criteria, in comparison to 72% of those currently receiving CLP support. The results show that high proportions (+/-80%) of early cohorts also achieve this indicator.

Figure 6: % of CPHHs consuming 3 meals per day & 5+ food groups



Spending more than 70% of a household's income on food is a strong indication that a household finds it challenging to manage consistent access to food. The October/ November 2014 survey showed (Figure 7) that the proportion of households spending 70% of income on food dropped from 72.2% in the control to an average of 22.6% in earlier cohorts.

Figure 7: % of CPHHs spending 70% or more of income on food



4.5. Improving Water, Sanitation and Hygiene Practices

CLP aims to improve WASH outcomes on the chars by 1) increasing access to improved drinking water sources, particularly for CPHHs 2) increasing access to sanitary latrines (for the whole community) and 3) influencing WASH behaviours such as hand washing.

Access to water: CLP-standard tube wells must fulfil the following criteria:

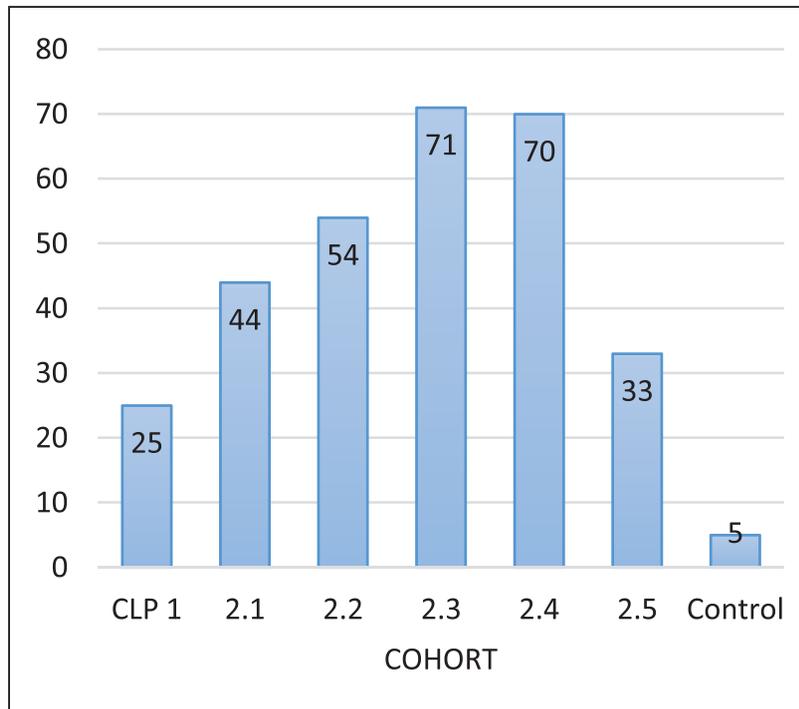
1. On a raised plinth above the highest known flood level
2. 40 feet deep (with some variation due to context)
3. At least 10 metres from a latrine
4. Have an intact concrete platform
5. Within a 10 minute round trip from the household.

Figure 8 shows significant increases in access to improved water sources between the control group and those who have received CLP support.

Results show a sizeable increase from 5% of the control group (Cohort 2.6 at baseline) to over 70% of current CLP participants accessing their water from an improved water source.

CLP's improved water policy came into effect in July 2013, which saw all core participants entitled to a new, or upgraded tube well. Prior to this, CLP did not prioritise core participant households but rather sought to improve water access within the community. This is part of the reason the proportion of CLP 1 participants with an improved water source is lower than CLP 2 cohorts. CLP is in the process of revisiting early cohort villages with the objective of improving access to water.

Figure 8: % of HHs with access to improved water

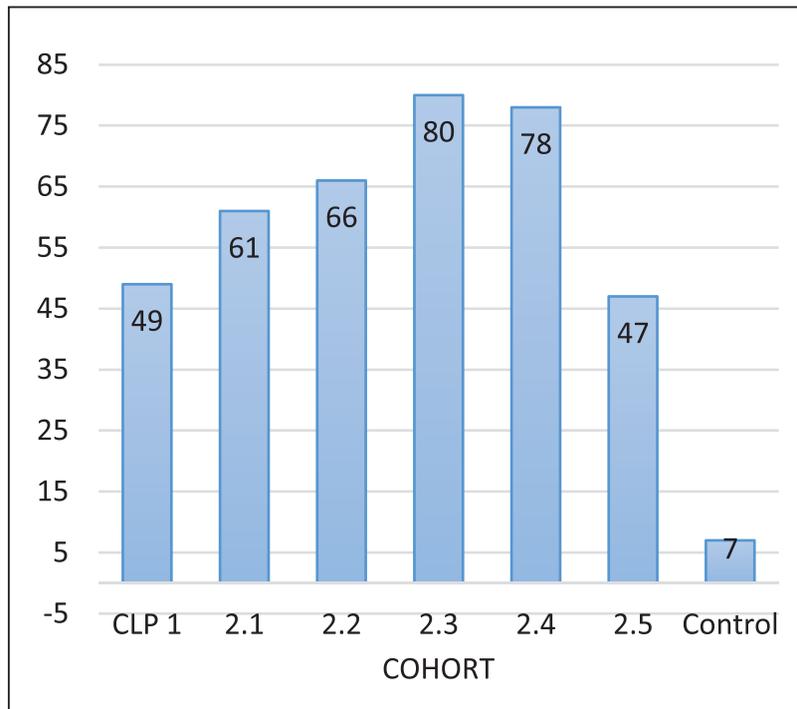


Access to Sanitation: CLP seeks to improve char communities access to sanitation by helping to install a latrine that meets the following standards:

1. Pit covered with concrete slab fitted with a pan and water seal
2. Pit supported internally
3. Latrine raised on plinth above flood line
4. Structure to provide privacy

Those with access to a latrine of any standard were predictably high, with 97% of CLP 1 participants and 66% of the control group having access to a latrine (any standard).

Figure 9: % of CPHHs with access to CLP-standard sanitary latrine



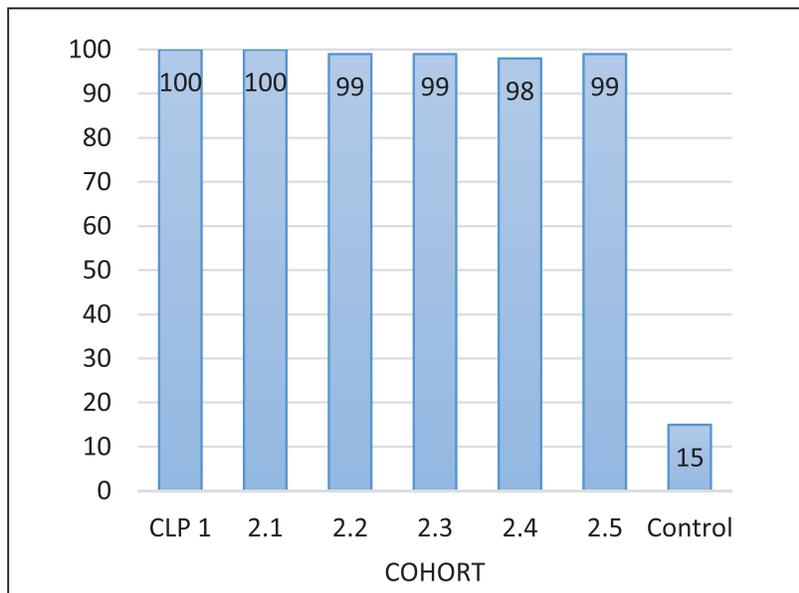
With just 7% of the control group having access to a sanitary latrine up to CLP standards, the Programme's impact is clearly visible in Figure 9, with up to 80% of existing participants and a minimum of 49% of CLP 1 cohort households having access to a sanitary latrine.

Improved hygiene practices: CLP not only improves WASH outcomes of households through infrastructure projects (latrines and water points), the Programme also aims to influence WASH attitudes and behaviours e.g. CLP emphasises the importance of washing hands. This has implications for improved food utilisation, as WASH is crucial to how households can use food to maximise its nutritional value. Household members, particularly women, are taught to wash their hands at critical times, such as before preparing/serving food, after coming back from the toilet, and after cleaning the cowshed. Other aspects of improved hygiene are encouraged e.g. using sanitary latrines, wearing sandals, and collecting, storing and using water safely.

Following on from this, the presence of soap near the latrine or water point is taken as an indicator of improved sanitation behaviour.

Figure 10 shows the number of respondents having soap/ash close to their water point/latrine jumps from 15% in the control group (Cohort 2.6 at baseline) to an impressive 99% in early cohorts. Furthermore, amongst cohorts that had graduated from CLP 1, this figure increases to 100%, suggesting that behavioural change occurs over time, and once achieved is sustained.

Figure 10: % of Respondents with soap/ ash near to their water point or latrine



4.6. Mixed Nutritional Outcomes

The CLP is having mixed results on nutrition. Data is showing improvements for some indicators such as women's body mass index but not in others e.g. child wasting. This is perhaps not all that surprising considering there are many factors affecting nutrition which are outside the control of CLP.

In early 2013 CLP rolled out additional nutrition-related activities, through a 'Direct Nutrition Intervention Project'. This project aims to improve the nutritional status of the CLP's core participant households, especially pregnant and breastfeeding women, children under five and adolescent girls. It is too early to assess whether this project is having an impact. Results are expected at the start of 2015.

4.7. On the Right Path Out of Extreme Poverty: Graduating Households

As explained earlier in the paper, there are issues in comparing CLP income data against an income poverty line. The Programme has therefore developed a set of graduation criteria. CLP finalised a set of 10 graduation criteria and methodology during the first quarter of 2014. The criteria relate to the multiple dimensions of poverty. Progress in meeting them enable the Programme assess whether a household is likely to be on the right trajectory out of extreme poverty.

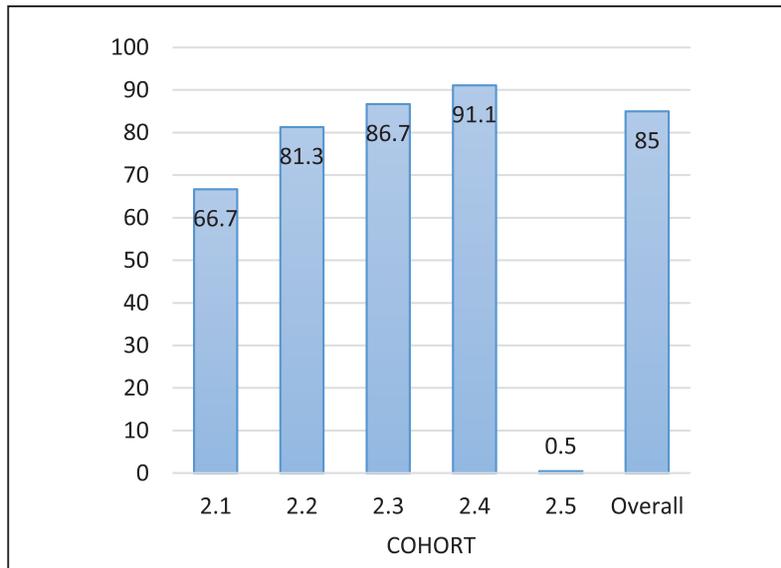
To graduate, a household must meet (any) six or more criteria within 3 months of completing the 18 month cycle. These criteria relate to 1) Income/ expenditure/ consumption 2) Nutrition 3) Asset base 4) Status of females 5) Vulnerability and 6) Access to services. CLP's official graduation rates for each cohort are based on this methodology⁴. The figures do not change. IMLC does however also track the sustainability of graduation rates through the annual surveys.

Figure 11 shows 85% of households from cohorts 2.1 to 2.4 had graduated at the end of the 18 month cycle of support (based on the method explained above). This is equivalent to 43,156 households and 167,877 people.

⁴ Kenward S et al (2010); Graduation: Results for Cohorts 2.1 to 2.4; Chars Livelihoods Programme

To provide context, the graduation rates for Cohort 2.5 are also shown but this is baseline data i.e. pre-CLP support. Predictably, almost no households graduate.

Figure 11: % of households graduating at the end of CLP support (at 18 months)



The lower graduation rate for Cohort 2.1 is likely due to methodology issues. The graduation criteria were only recently concluded (March 2014). Data came from two separate surveys, depending on indicator, one survey 6 months before the end of support and one survey 10 months after support ended. This was effectively looking at sustainability of graduation for some indicators. Graduation rates for Cohort 2.1 are therefore likely to be slightly underestimated.

Criteria that are being met by the vast majority of CPHHs at the end of the 18 month cycle are:

- Household eats three meals a day AND consumes five or more food groups in the past week
- Presence of ash/ soap near to water point or latrine
- Household has membership of social group

Graduation criteria being met by relatively fewer households at the end of the 18 month cycle are:

- Household has cash savings of more than Tk 3,000
- Household has access to improved water
- Productive assets worth more than Tk 30,000

4.8. Conclusion

Through the asset transfer project, CLP is able to help extreme poor households living on the chars diversify their livelihoods. Households are able to move away from a heavy reliance on agricultural wage labour to achieving a higher proportion of their income derived from land and agricultural produce (crops and livestock). Households are therefore in a better position to weather shocks such as a family illness and erosion. Equally important and inter-related aspects of a sustainable livelihood are WASH outcomes, women's empowerment and food security – all areas where CLP has seen impressive results.

With 85% of core households meeting six out of ten graduation criteria, the vast majority of CLP participants are therefore likely to be on the right trajectory out of extreme poverty.

TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION STRATEGY IN BANGLADESH: A POLICY ASK



TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE SOCIAL PROTECTION STRATEGY IN BANGLADESH

Saifuddin Ahmed and S.M. Monjur Rashid, CARE Bangladesh

Abstract

Since the late 1990s, social protection has been an important aspect of the development policy agenda for achieving of at least six of the eight present MDGs. It represents the combination of formal and informal initiatives that provide income or in-kind transfers in combination with other forms of support to poor and vulnerable households. Social protection programs address the different dimensions of poverty and disparity.

Interest from policy makers in social protection has been driven by the persistence of chronic poverty, food insecurity, climate vulnerability and recent global economic crises. The progress in social development and the reduction in poverty confirms the positive impacts of social protection programs on a range of wellbeing outcomes, from increased income and consumption to improved access to education and health care.

Despite the positive impacts, new challenges in the realm of social protection remain. Challenges with the current political situation are resulting in governance deficits e.g. in the delivery of basic services. The Government's constitutional pledge is to provide a decent living for its people. To this end, the Government has taken several initiatives and there has been a certain level of progress. The Government has embarked on the development of a comprehensive National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) that aims to streamline and strengthen existing safety net programs with a view to achieving better results. It also aims to broaden the scope of social protection from the more narrow safety net concept to include employment policies and social insurance to address the emerging needs of a middle income country by 2021 and beyond. Indeed, Bangladesh has significant building blocks in place in social protection in terms of design, implementation and institutional actors. This policy paper states that a "radical re-thinking" of social protection should not be the aim. Rather, what is needed is a new approach or vision which builds on existing platforms to tackle poverty and vulnerability in Bangladesh.

Introduction

Beginning in the late 1990s, social protection has been one of the predominant development policy agendas for the pursuit of at least six of the eight present MDGs. Social protection programs deal with various dimensions of poverty and disparity. Policy makers' interest in social protection has been driven by the persistence of chronic poverty, food insecurity, climate vulnerability and recent global economic crises. The progress in social development and reduction in poverty confirms the positive impacts of social protection programs on a range of wellbeing outcomes, from increased income and consumption to improved access to education and health care. The positive impacts have also unleashed new challenges in the realm of social

(Social protection denotes the combination of formal and informal initiatives that provide income or in-kind transfers in combination with other forms of support to poor and vulnerable households to: i) act as safety net for extremely poor; ii) protect people against risks and consequences of livelihood shocks; iii) promote people out of poverty; iv) support social justice for more equitable outcomes for all.)

protection. The numbers and coverage of social protection programs are constantly expanding – though there are large gaps and unmet needs that remain, also running simultaneously. Sustaining the significant trends of growth may become increasingly difficult without an improvement in service delivery along with a more rapid reduction in poverty.

The existing social safety net programs are mostly rural-focused, with limited coverage backed by meager allocation and managed by a fragmented bureaucratic set-up. As a result, these programs fail to spot the substantial population that remains exposed to poverty owing to various

vulnerabilities. This includes the population that remains below the poverty line and those that are just above the poverty line, but could easily fall below because of these vulnerabilities. Evidence shows that the poor and vulnerable group cannot cope with the risks and shocks to their resources.

– The **long-term vision** of the National Social Protection Strategy is to:

“Build an inclusive SPS for all Bangladeshis that effectively tackles and prevents poverty and rising inequality and contributes to broader human development, employment and economic growth.”

– The **goal** for the National Social Protection Strategy is to:

“Reform the national SPS by ensuring more efficient and effective use of resources, strengthened delivery systems and progress towards a more inclusive form of social protection that effectively tackles lifecycle risks, prioritizing the poorest and most vulnerable members of society.”

Social Protection in the Context of Bangladesh

The prevalence of institutional failures underwritten by the current political settlement is a commonly observed circumstance, characterizing a state with governance deficits and limited access and order for the delivery of services to its citizens¹. The constitutional pledge of the government is to provide a decent living for its people. The government has taken several initiatives and there has been a certain level of progress; however, this is less than the requirements to ensure such living standards for all and the peoples’ participation is far from satisfactory. The main tool that the Government of Bangladesh uses for social security purposes for the poor is the provision of social safety net programs (SSNPs- Figure 1).

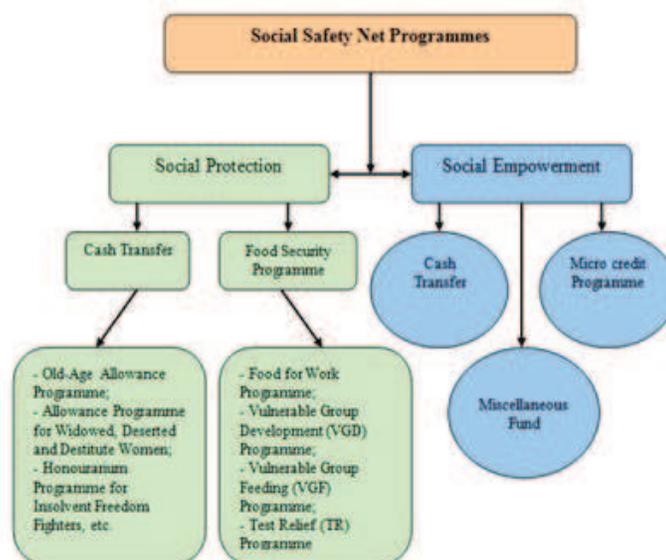


Figure 1: Social Safety Net Programs

¹ Bangladesh: Economic Growth in a Vulnerable LAO. 2010. Paper presented at the World Bank, Washington 4th June 2010 as part of the Limited Access Order project in Developing Countries led by Douglass North, John Wallis, Barry Weingast and Steve Webb. The papers are due to be published in a book following up the Douglass North et al. book on Violence and Social Orders.

These SSNPs are mainly delivered on an ad-hoc basis to cope with sudden vulnerabilities. The benefits of these programs are *short term in nature*, though there are some long-running programs like vulnerable group development (VGD), vulnerable group feeding (VGF), food for work (FFW) programs, cash transfer programs, etc. It is observed that reasonable growth rates have led to decline in the percentage of the poor; however, actual numbers of the poor have not declined and expenditures on safety nets have fallen at the same time. Though safety net programs are important components of the Government’s social protection strategy, expenditure on the programs are fairly low and relatively declining to meet the current fiscal deficit – it is also lower than what other countries at similar levels of development spend on these programs.

Why Social Protection Matters

The Government of Bangladesh has embarked on the formulation of a comprehensive National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) that streamlines and strengthens the existing safety-net programs with a view to achieve better results, and to broaden the scope of social protection from the more narrow safety-net concept to include employment policies and social insurance, and address the emerging needs of a middle-income country by 2021 and beyond. The government’s social protection policy must be seen as a core element of the other policies and programs that together comprise the broader social development framework. The main objective of this framework is to have a comprehensive and consistent set of policies that can help Bangladesh achieve better equity and social justice in the context of its development efforts.

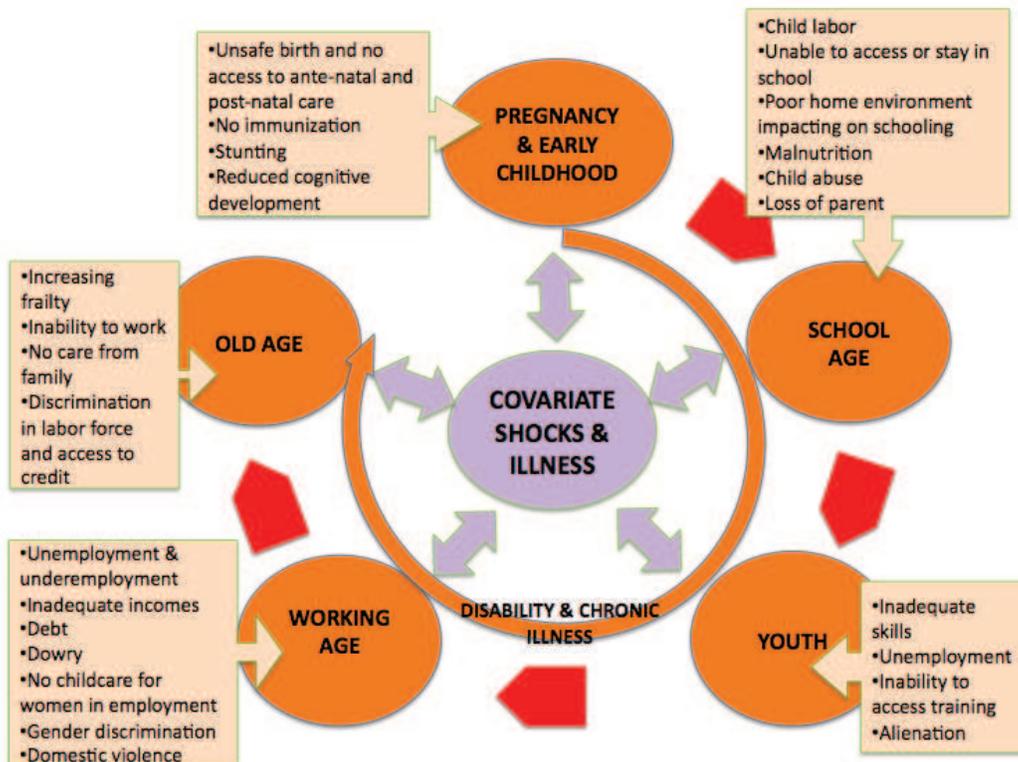


Figure 2: Life Cycle Risks

A more strategic and analytically elegant way of looking at the current structure is to classify it in the context of a life cycle framework. The poor and vulnerable population faces shocks and challenges at different stages of the life cycle (Figure² 2). Some of the underlying risks, if not addressed on time, can have life-lasting negative impacts. For example, the special healthcare needs faced by a mother during pregnancy and delivery or childcare needs during infancy (age 0-2) could easily jeopardize an infant's well-being for life, if not managed well. Similarly, the vulnerabilities faced by a poor old person (age 65 plus) are much more challenging than those faced by a poor person during the working age cycle. A social protection system that recognizes these differences in risks at different stages of the life cycle, and seeks to address them, will likely provide a more effective support system than one that does not specifically respond to the needs of life-cycle related risks.

CARE's Position & Experience

CARE's global Food Security Strategy (FSS) embraces a comprehensive approach to social protection – one that promotes long-term resilience using multi-sector and integrated program components. Rather than viewing social protection as only income and consumption transfers, CARE's FSS combines traditional safety net mechanisms (i.e. Direct food assistance in emergency contexts) with activities that promote and protect the livelihoods of poor and vulnerable women and their families, thereby reducing risk and vulnerability to shock. In Bangladesh, CARE has been a major player in working with the extreme poor populations in both rural and urban settings, addressing food insecurity and poverty through the implementation of various development projects; in particular, successive Title II Food Security programs by USAID, have been recognized globally as most significant amongst other Title II programs implemented recently.

From global social protection frameworks for developing an appropriate national social protection strategy in Bangladesh, there are a number of areas, which CARE recognizes as supportive to the development of a social protection strategy in a context like Bangladesh:

Poverty and vulnerability are not static; they result from both economic and social risks: A core element across the range of social protection conceptual frameworks is their focus on vulnerability (not just poverty), which highlights the dynamic nature of poverty (Barrientos and Hulme, 2008)³. Moreover, there is a shift of focus which moves social protection beyond constituting a mere safety net, which largely confines its scope for targeted income and consumption transfers, and extends it to arenas such as equity, empowerment and economic, social and cultural rights (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; UNICEF, 2012). This incorporates a focus on chronic and structural vulnerability: an equity lens which incorporates vulnerabilities caused by, for example, lifestyle risks, gender inequalities, marginalization and exclusion.

2 National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) of Bangladesh, January 2014, General Economic Division, Planning Commission, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

3 Barrientos, A. and Hulme, D. 2008, Social protection for the poor and poorest. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave, 2008.

The design and implementation of social protection must be embedded in a systems approach:

It is increasingly recognized that to maximize the benefits of social protection, it needs to be integrated into a broader poverty-reduction approach. An integrated system and development of a multi-sector approach is critical to enable social protection programs that more effectively and efficiently address the multiple vulnerabilities that poor and vulnerable households face (UNICEF, 2012). This includes ensuring synergies and linkages between key elements of social protection and a range of social protection objectives – protection, prevention, promotion and transformation – which are critical components to enable households to graduate and move out of poverty (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004).

Implementing institutions need to be strengthened to deliver social protection predictably, at scale, and in coordination with other programs and services:

Long-term national financing strategies are required in order to implement social protection interventions at scale, which respond to the needs of the population. These are not just technical or financial issues, but are also political choices (UNICEF, 2012). Effective institutional coordination at national and local levels can not only promote the development of an integrated approach to social protection, but can also draw on a wide range of social protection tools in combination with relevant complementary services and programs to better respond to the multiple vulnerabilities faced by the poor.

Indeed, Bangladesh has significant building blocks already in place in social protection, in terms of design, implementation and institutional actors. However, while it is recognized that a “radical rethinking” of social protection is not the aim here, the current challenges which the social protection sector faces mean that a new approach or vision for social protection, which builds on existing platforms, is urgently needed in order to improve the effectiveness of social protection to tackle poverty and vulnerability in Bangladesh now and in the future.

Our Policy Asks:

- **A regulatory platform for improved functionality of the social protection program**
Bangladesh’s current social protection system is complex, comprising a large number of programs and managed by many ministries. According to a comprehensive official compilation prepared by the Ministry of Finance, there are 95 programs under the social protection system currently financed through the budget. The total amount spent on these programs in FY13 was BDT 231 billion, which was equivalent to 2.2 percent of GDP. These programs are administered by as many as 30 line ministries/agencies and there is no formal mechanism for sharing information among the implementing ministries/agencies. This circumstance projects an immense requirement for a common regulatory body that can supervise and coordinate among ministries regarding social protection programs. The formation and delegation of authority to a regulatory board could enhance functionality of social protection programs as well as push for an integrated approach to eradicating poverty and building resilience on climate vulnerability.

- **Reaching the most vulnerable effectively**

Because of the proliferation of programs, the budget for most programs is small and the average benefit per individual is low. While coverage of beneficiaries has increased, the targeting performance suggests the need for improvement. For example, in 2010 of the 24.5 percent of households who reported benefitting from at least one of the 30 social protection programs covered, 82 percent of the beneficiaries belonged to the poor and extreme poor groups while some 18 percent of the beneficiaries were non-poor. Importantly, as noted above, 64 percent of the poor did not have access to any social protection program⁴. The situation suggests that a clearly defined target process should be introduced, focusing on the extremely poor and the women, because these are the most vulnerable groups of the population with regard to accessing social protection programs. Geographical variations and requirements also have to be considered when designing targeting processes. Development of a national database for beneficiaries could be a key solution for targeting errors. The development process of the database can follow participatory methods through community consultation processes.

- **Including the poor and extreme poor in the delivery of social protection schemes**

The participation and voice of the extreme poor and poor in the decision-making processes of government and civil society institutions is extremely limited due to constraints of opportunity and capacity, and societal norms supporting class and gender-based differences. To a large extent, the poor and extreme poor are not seen as having, and do not see themselves as having, any power to influence the processes of local governance that determine access to resources and services. A political and economic analysis of the social protection sector might include questions to understand the distribution of power amongst different groups and individuals in the social protection sector, and how different actors interact with one another; the processes and structures which create, sustain and transform these relationships in the social protection sector over time; and what this means for the use of knowledge in policy making (e.g. See Shaxson et al, 2011)⁵.

⁴ Household Income and Expenditure Survey (HIES) 2010, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh.

⁵ Shaxson, L., Gachihi, W., Githinji, J., & Lyon, A. (2011). Institutional development of the ASAL secretariat. London: Delta.

Conclusions

Policy decisions are political, shaped by the interests and interactions of various actors. Despite the Government's investment in social protection in Bangladesh over the years, relatively little is known about the forms of politics that underpin social protection. With an overall objective of reducing the economic and social vulnerability of poor, vulnerable and marginalized groups, a national inclusive social protection policy would encompass a range of initiatives and transfers to the poor. Social protection programs would need to be designed to acknowledge the changing nature of climate-related impacts, including the future existence of conditions that have not been experienced before. It is critical in developing a sustainable social protection strategy that states what role government, donors and other political forces play during the formation and implementation of strategies.

EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN ISLAND CHARs: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES PERSPECTIVE



EMPLOYMENT GENERATION IN ISLAND CHARs: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES PERSPECTIVE

By **Zahid Rahman, Choyon Kumar Saha, Anjuman Ara Sumi**
Unnayan Shamannay

Introduction

Island chars located at different parts of the country are normally considered as detached area, whereas most population are living in miserable conditions and deprived of many state supports and livelihood services. It is shown that approximately 5 to 6 million people in Bangladesh live in char lands those who are always struggling against hunger, poverty, malnourishment, food insecurity and so on (Unnayan Shamannay, 2009). These areas are also regarded as one of the poverty pockets of Bangladesh. The overall living condition of isolated char people is extensively miserable and beyond comparison. These people are known as marginalized, vulnerable and extreme poor people. The island or isolated char people are badly deprived of food, cloth, education along with other fundamental rights; for which a great deal of the char people cannot be turned into human capital for the country. This deprivation has been for a long time due to not only geo-physical structure but also lack of concentration of government policy makers, development agencies and private sectors investors. Therefore, extreme poverty, existing inequalities between the islands' char people and the mainland's people and seasonal variation and lack of economic diversity are the main problems of the island char people. The island char people always struggle with their lives due to poor communication system, lack of diversified employment opportunities, lack of diversified economic activities and frequent disaster attacking zone.

Amongst many, however, north and north-western Riverine Island chars are recognized as highly vulnerable areas of Bangladesh in which disproportionate numbers of the extreme poor are fighting to generate their livelihood options and ensure their food security. In addition very remoteness makes them highly vulnerable and expose to different kinds of livelihood risks. The extreme poor suffer from limited access to basic services such as health, education, water and sanitation. They have lower educational attainment and suffer from malnutrition and various kinds of diseases. Most of them are functionally landless due to annual river bank erosion of homestead and agricultural lands. They are typically relying on casual wage labor for income and daily livelihood. Monga (seasonal periods of hunger due to lack of work and income) still affects many people of island dwellers (Conroy et al., 2010). The extremely poor people are not just economically disadvantaged but also lack of organizational capacity that resist them to be empowered in terms of income, employment and capital accumulation. They are also least aware about their basic rights and civic privileges, and as well least capable of claiming them. As the extremely poor are socially isolated, many state supports and services such as health, education, water and sanitation, and social assistance do not reach to them properly. This exacerbates their poverty and limits community capacity to create income generating options, which passes from one generation to the next. In that context, various development organizations (stated in next section) are attempting to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger through generating employment opportunities as part of accomplishing the first goal of MDGs.

According to the baseline survey conducted on December 2011 under Nodi o Jibon-II project, on an average 30% of households members, male and female together, aged 14 years and above are always unemployed (Concern Worldwide Bangladesh, 2011). In char areas most of the people who are employed are engaged in poor livelihood activities such as agricultural works, daily laborer, earth works, fishing and so on. Besides during the disaster such as in flood monsoon, the rate is reached at peak, and the extreme poor migrate from their native villages in search of employment. It should be noted that there are also many constraints in generating employment options for millions of poor such as geophysical locations, resources limitations, state negligence, natural calamities, sandy soil, lack of crops diversification and innovative capacity to generate livelihoods opportunities etc. Simultaneously a lot of opportunities exist in island char areas just like as vast leisure population and uncultivated land and so on, that would be properly utilized to generate employment opportunities among extreme poor people. The aim of this present research is to explore these existing challenges, and way out future opportunities and potentialities for generating employment in these remote island chars. Many development organizations are working on addressing extreme poverty and, freeing millions of people from hunger and malnutrition at isolated island chars in north-western Bangladesh. An integral part of this effort, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh is implementing new project called Nodi O Jibon-II, which covers 14,885 extreme poor households with a focus primarily on women at remote island chars in 24 unions in 10 Upazilas of Lalmonirhat, Pabna, Rajshahi and Chapai Nawabganj district with a total population of 75,000 (Concern Worldwide Bangladesh, 2011). One of the major objectives of this project is to employ extreme poor households through promoting private enterprises and employment opportunities in and outside char areas.

Methods and Materials

The different objectives of the study are warranted different approaches to incorporate. This study has undertaken an integrated approach of both quantitative and qualitative methods of data collection. The primary data collection method including questionnaire survey on households in selected island chars makes the study fully participatory. The qualitative study also includes FGDs with char communities and KIs with selected stakeholders as part of union level investigation. In addition to this secondary information has also been used extensively to compare and analysis the overall employment situation, employment problems and future prospects in the North and North-western Island chars of Bangladesh.

The present study is conducted at 10 chars of following Upazilas including Bagha, Godagari, Shibgonj, Chapai sadar, Bera, Pabna sadar, Aditmari, Hatibandha, Kaligonj and Lalmonirhat sadar under four districts particularly Rajshahi, Pabna, Lalmonirhat, and Chapai Nawabganj. One char has selected from one union in respective Upazila and district. In total 700 households' were selected as study sample out of 3428 households' of 10 Upazilas of four districts. The procedures involved in the estimation of sample size has discussed in just subsequent part of this section. The char's selection is based on the extreme poverty coverage, lacking employment and working opportunities and skill development through proper trainings. Almost all chars are isolated land and completely detached from the mainland areas.

Table: Detailed distribution of study areas with sample size

District	Upazila	Union	Island char	Households (Approx.)	Sample size	Rounded up
Rajshahi	Bagha	Gorgori	Laxminagar Char	369	75	70
	Godagari	Char Asharidah	Manik Char	343	70	70
Chapai Nawabganj	Shibgonj	Paka	Nishipara Char	280	57	65
	Chapai Sadar	Alatuli	Lutarupara Char	300	61	70
Pabna	Bera	Nutun Varenga	Augbugshua	343	70	70
	Pabna Sadar	Hemayetpur	Hemayetpur Char	410	83	75
Lalmonirhat	Aditmari	Mohishkhocha	Chander Char	300	61	67
	Hatibandha	Duabari	Purbo Duabari	403	82	73
	Kaligonj	Votmari	Kalikapur char	300	61	65
	Lalmonirhat Sadar	Rajpur	Changrar char	380	77	75
Total				3428	697	700

Results and Analysis

The results of this present study are classified here into two sub-sections on the basis of quantitative and qualitative outputs. This chapter describes the key findings of present study particularly the socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents, current employment status in northwestern char areas; initiatives of government, non-government and private organization in generating employment in island char areas and the role of credit programs in supporting char people to be employed. Finally, this chapter delineates the major constraints to employment generation and potential means and future initiatives to overcome these obstacles as soon. The chapter also discusses the existing potentialities and opportunities of northwestern island chars and its dwellers living with leisure time. This chapter also includes the stakeholders' perception to government policies and effectiveness to employment generation at char areas. The section highlights gender discrimination in terms of getting jobs and wage at local level. The chapter also reveals the efficiency and capacity of northwestern char dwellers to get a job and their expectation to obtain training on particular issues which is more effective to be employed.

1. Socio-demographic Information

The proportion of male and female for the study was nearly equal consisting male (49.9%) and female (50.1%) in both district and upazila level. Approximately half of the respondents (49.7%) in northwestern char areas are just only read and write their name and basic literacy knowledge as they argued there were lacking of educational institutions and teaching staffs in existing schools and others. Hence, a significant portion (23%) of char people cannot read and write that means they are truly illiterate. The findings shows that an insignificant portion of respondents (7.3%) would pass their secondary school level with very struggling and limited endowed resources. As they have scant opportunity to attain in educational institutions at graduate level, so, very poor number of respondents (0.2) was able to obtain

their graduate degree. Besides, remote areas, poor economic capacity, lack of educational institutions and teaching staffs are considered as major constraints to get education.

A significant portion of respondents (37.6%) was aged between 21-30 years old and 32.1% respondents were 31-40 years old. The study covered very small number of respondents (5% and 7.4%) those were aged below 20 and above 50 respectively. This is, however, an indication that the sample HH respondents were selected based on considering those who were best eligible for the study and involved in work force activities and income/wage earning sectors. A considerable portion (35%) of char people annually earns Tk. 40,001-60,000 and it is high at Lalmonirhat sadar upazila. And nearly 28% char people can earn only Tk. 60,001-1,00,000, where Pabna sadar (5.4%) is at top and kaligonj (0.4%) is at lowest of this income category. It is notable that 22% people earn only Tk. 20,001-40,000 in each year which indicates the presence of extreme economic hardship of these households. No household has available in Aditmari, Hatibandha, Lalmonirhat sadar and Kaligonj who can earn more than Tk. 1,00,000 in each year which denotes the incidence of extreme economic hardship in these areas where average monthly income is about Tk. 12,000. Godagari (4.1%) is the top most upazila where annual households' income is Tk. 100001-200000 in compare to Bagha, Shibgonj, Chapai sadar and Pabna sadar.

Due to frequent natural disasters and gradual accretion of char land, a significant portion (38.5%) of households' lost their agricultural land and only 19.8% people have private ownership of agricultural land. Though there is huge amount of khas land in char areas but only 0.8% people have access to agricultural khas land in char areas. Besides, a considerable number (35.6%) of char dwellers involves in sharecropping in agricultural production.

2. Status of Employment Opportunities in Northwestern Island Chars

The survey findings indicate, 24.7% people urged that there are particular job opportunities in northwestern island char areas and these opportunities are comparatively high in Lalmonirhat (11.7%) and Rajshahi (11.9%). But these are very scarcely available or no opportunities in Pabna (0.7%) and Chapai Nawabganj (0.4%). people living in Pabna sadar, Aditmari and Shibgonj upazila think their areas are completely depriving of these particular opportunities. Hence, Pabna and Chapai nawabganj is most vulnerable region in getting specific job facilities. But 75.3% char dwellers differed that there were no any particular job opportunities in char areas.

There are four major types of working opportunities in northwestern char areas and these are digging soil (51%), making infrastructure (1.3%), cottage industry (0.1%), and agricultural activities (8.1%) in their locality or outsides. But a significant portion of people urged that most of the available opportunities are earth work or digging soil in char areas. Respondents urged that though some working opportunities are available but a considerable portion (73.1%) of them are deprived of these particular opportunities because of influence, partiality and manipulation by the local powerful. And 26.9% people get these opportunities and most of them are involves in labor force activities e.g. soil work and agricultural works.

The survey findings reflect the scarcity of working opportunities in northwestern island char areas as large portion (75.7%) of char dwellers regularly goes outside to seek job and earn wages, and it is very high in Lalmonirhat district (34.6%). The table 4.10 shows that people of Lalmonirhat sadar (9.7%) has greater trends to work at outsides and then the dwellers of Bera (8.9%) and Hatibandha (8.9%) falls into the second largest region who work at outsides their char areas. The people of two upazilas such as Bagha (6%) and Godagari (5.7%) in Rajshahi district (11.7%) has lower incidence in going out their own locality to be involved in workforce activities and earn livelihoods. It reflects the deprivation of government and non-government working opportunities in remote char areas.

3. Government Initiatives in Employment Generation in Island Chars

In response to the opinion about existing working opportunities in protecting government resources such as caring green plantation, government infrastructures and drawing tax from local hut/bazaar at local level, 80.6% char dwellers informed that there are no such kinds of working scope in their locality.

The survey findings reflect that the people, who consented about the existence of working opportunities (19.4%) in their own district, get benefit 51.5% and 47.1% in Rajshahi and Chapai Nawabganj district respectively. The people living in Lalmonirhat falls in lowest (1.5%) incidence of getting work chance in protecting government resources.

There are different types of employment opportunities under social safety net programs such as kabikha, kabita and 100 days employment programs etc. About 78% people of them agreed that there is employment scope under social safety net programs, in which the people living in Lalmonirhat (30.4%) get top most employment opportunities under these programs. Though Lalmonirhat falls in greater incidence of safety net opportunities but the people living at Aditmari under this district are completely deprived of these services where Lalmonirhat sadar (10.7%), Hatibandha (10.4%), Pabna sadar (10.3%), Bagha (10%) and Godagari (10%) get employment scope at standard level. There are major three types of employment opportunities under social safety net programs such as kabikha, kabita and 100 days employment programs. Around 76% people informed that 100 days employment generation is major work type under social safety net programs whereas kabikha (0.4%) and kabitha (1.3%) falls into very lowest incidence.

There were no single people who get benefit of employment scope under kabitha program. They get working scope under 100 days employment programs (4.6%) and Kabikha (0.7%). It is very alarming that only 5.3% people get employment benefit out of 77.7% (as respondents' consent on the coverage of employment benefit under SSNP). It is revealed that despite a good coverage of employment benefit under SSNP in Bagha (10%) and Godgari (10%), no single people living at Laxminagar char and Manik char was found under this employment coverage.

4. NGOs Initiatives in Employment Generation in Island Chars

NGOs are displaying satisfactory performance in generating employment opportunities' in island char areas. The findings presented in table 4.16 show that 99% people informed that NGOs are continuing their employment generation activities both in agriculture and non-agricultural sectors in Laxminagar

char, Manik char, Nishipara char, Lutarupara char, Augbugshua, Hemayetpur char, Chander char, Purbo Duabari, Kalikapur char, Changrar char of four districts.

Despite people's agreeing with the significant coverage (99%) of employment opportunities initiated by NGOs, more than half (56.3%) of the people still far away from/don't getting these opportunities and it is very high in Lalmonirhat (21.3%) district. In compare to other upazilas, Changrar char of Lalmonirhat sadar and Hemayetpur char of Pabna sadar are faced highest deprivation in getting these services falling into 7.5% and 7.3% respectively. The findings show that the people living at Laxminagar char of Bagha upazila (7.3%) are increasingly getting these services compare to other char areas particularly Augbugshua, Lutarupara char, Nishipara char, Laxminagar char etc.

The findings suggest that significant number (33.6%) of char dwellers receive livestock rearing facilities and 31% get financial supports for vegetable gardening at their nearest homestead land as part of income generating activities. NGOs provides financial supports, trainings, seeds and technical guidelines for homestead gardening. They also provide livestock to their beneficiaries as if they can earn something. NGOs, in some cases, provide supports for rearing poultries at household levels and the proportion is considerable (20%) in compare to agricultural supports (10%).

Despite a vast amount of leisure population who are able to work both agricultural and non-agricultural activities in char areas a significant portion (41%) urge that there are no non-agricultural employment opportunities generated by NGOs. Most of them (32.5%) get work in labor force activities like raising homestead land. And in some cases, NGOs provide financial supports to run or start small business (21%) like grocery in their own locality. Sometimes, they provide assistance to initiate and continue handicrafts work (5.5%) in char areas. It also revealed during the survey that people involved in handicraft works are most women who pass leisure time and no income earning opportunities.

The results suggest that a large portion of char dwellers (87%) do not get any kinds of non-agricultural employment supports from NGOs initiatives. Just 10.3% char dwellers involve in homestead raising activities in their own areas. Though respondents suggest that there is a good coverage (21%) of small business opportunities generated by NGOs in upazila level but only 2.3% char dwellers get this kind of assistance from working organizations and it is very little in handicraft works (0.2%).

It is noted that local, national and international NGOs have been arranging different kinds of trainings on income generating activities and it is prevailed in all working upazilas covering 79.3% in which Lalmonirhat falls into 39.6% at large extent. The table shows that there is little skill development training arranged by NGOs at Godagari (0.1%) under Rajshahi district whereas it is more significant in Lalmonirhat sadar (10.7%), Hatibandha (10.1%), Bera (9.6%), Aditmari (9.4%) and Kaligonj (9.3%) upazilas.

Though non-government organizations have taken initiatives for employment generation in both agricultural and non-agricultural sectors but the inhabitants of Augbugshua and Hemayetpur char under Pabna and Laxminagar char and Manik char under Rajshahi, and Chander char of Aditmari upazila don't get

any kinds of supports to be employed in other job sectors except agriculture and non-agriculture that they created. The supports of NGOs to be employed in others are very scarce and 96.1% char dwellers informed that NGOs have no role yet in linking to other organizations where they can pursue employment in future. Only the people of Changrar char in Lalmonirhat sadar (3%) is urged that some NGOs are playing role in creating linkages with other organizations as if char dwellers can be employed.

5. Private Sectors Initiatives in Employment Generation in Island Chars

The private sectors have the most significant role in generating employment opportunities in and outside the char areas which is reflected in table 4.22 suggest that private initiators is more active in Rajshahi (20%) in compare to Pabna (10.9%) and Lalmonirhat (9.3%) whereas Chapai sadar and Shibganj upazila of Chapai Nawabganj district is completely deprived of getting these private sectors opportunities. Along with these upazilas, the people living at Purbo Duabari, Kalikapur char and Chander char under Hatibandha, Kaliganj and Aditmari upazila respectively are completely deprived of the employment opportunities generated by of private sector initiatives. In contrast, dwellers of Hemayetpur char comparae to Bagha (10%) and Godagari (10%) get more priorities from private sector initiatives. It should mention here that, around 60% areas have no coverage of these employment generation opportunities.

6. Credit Programs and Employment Opportunities in Island Chars

The findings of the present study reflect that 98.4% people do not get any kinds of loan from government institutions and just very insignificant portion (1.6%) of respondents replied that they borrow loan from government institutions. Because of lacking economic capacity to pay the loan money and usury or interest, no char dwellers was available in Hemayetpur, Augbugshua, Lutarupara and Manik char areas who would borrow loan from government institution like Krishi bank and others. Very insignificant number of people (1.3%) in Lalmonirhat sadar upazila gets this support from government institutions. The survey results indicate that people in these respective char areas generally borrow loan from following two government institutions like Krishi Bank (63.6%) and Janata Bank (36.4%).

Despite working many NGOs in island char areas, more than three fourth of respondents (84%) informed that people living at respective chars do not get any kinds of loan from any non government organization (table 4.25) and it is very high in Lalmonirhat district (30.4%) and later in Rajshahi (17.3%). In terms taking loan from NGOs, the dwellers of Purbo Duabari char under Hatibandha upazila (5%) is at top level whereas the people of Augbugshua char under Bera upazila (0.1%) are significantly deprived. Generally, the people take loan from following non government organizations such as ASA, BRAC, Proyash, Mahajan, RDRS, SKS, Ushaka, and Islami bank etc.

7. Constraints, Potentialities and Means of Generating Employment Opportunities in Char Areas

The respondents who perceived that they have relevant trainings (7.9%) on different productive activities have trainings on following sectors such as Paravet, poultry or livestock, driving and agricultural production. Most of the people of these upazilas have trained up on agricultural production (49%) in which

Purbo Duabari char of Hatibandha upazila (14.5%) is at top and Kalikapur char of Kaligonj upazila (9%) is the second largest. In terms of getting trainings on different issues Hatibandha (21.8%) is at top most and Aditmari (20%) is at second position (Table 4.28). In contrast, the dwellers of Hemayetpur char in Pabna sadar (1.8%) upazila are completely deprived of particular skill development training opportunities such as paravet, poultry/livestock and agriculture. Besides, the char dwellers of Bagha and Godagari upazila particularly deprive of getting paravet, driving and poultry/livestock skill development training opportunities. Furthermore, the dwellers of Chander char of Aditmari upazila (13%) get best training opportunity than Purbo Duabari char of Hatibandha upazila (7.3%) which is second largest, for rearing livestock and poultry at their households' level.

The findings suggest that a large number (39.7%) of respondents have strong inclination to be involved in livestock rearing activities after receiving training on livestock production and rearing, as grazing land are available in char areas. It is revealed that, sewing is the second most popular job among char people as one fourth (24.4%) surveyed people responded that they want to involve in this employment option and 20% dwellers wanted to be involved in business related activities if they get relevant training and financial supports. The findings also reflect that char dwellers also want to involve in cottage (3.7%), poultry (6%), and dairy production (2.8%) after receiving training on respected areas. It is notable that despite lot opportunities of agricultural production in char areas but very small portion of char dwellers interested to be involved in agricultural production (0.8%) and in homestead gardening activities (0.9%) after receiving training.

Table: Major obstacles to employment generation and way of overcoming the obstacles to employment

Obstacles to employment generation	Percent	Means to overcome obstacles	Percent
Lacking economic capacity	11.7	Developing communication system	30.7
River bank erosion	19.5	Providing credit (without/minimum interest)	7.5
Remote communication system	25.6	Land raising	1.4
Sandy land	3.6	Provide training	5.8
Lack of proper training	2.9	Build embankment	23.7
Lack of agricultural equipment	1.5	Establishing educational institutions	5.9
Lack of loan services	1.4	Modern agricultural technology	4.9
Poor education system	6.5	Establishing dairy farms	0.7
Natural calamities	8.3	Operating poultry farms	0.8
Lack of electricity	6.9	Financial supports to char people	5.8
Higher cost of irrigation	2.8	Private entrepreneurs	1.4
Lacking modern agricultural knowledge	1.4	Providing agricultural inputs	2.1
Landlessness	4.6	Increase government services	3.3
Absence of entrepreneurs	2.3	Electrification	5.9
High production costs	0.8		
Total	100.0	Total	100.0

The study respondents identified (Table: 4.33) some potential agro crops which are more potential in char areas and may enhance the income earning opportunities and may guide to employment generation. According to their suggestion the most prospective agricultural crops are maize (19%), chilly (12.3%), onion (12.5%), potato (10%), tobacco (6.7%), groundnut (6.7%), jute (6.2%), wheat (6.2%),

Mashkalai (3.6%), pumpkin (3.6%) and others agro-crops e.g. paddy, water melon, eggplant, holud etc. These agro products are most prospective items of agriculture in island char areas and may increase the income opportunities of char dwellers. On the other hand, they also suggested some non-agricultural initiatives which may enhance employment scope for char dwellers. Among many the most non-agricultural initiatives are livestock farming (28.8%), handicrafts and cottage industries (19.3%), poultry farming (11.3%), export human resources (14.9%), fodder production (7.7%), Shoaon cultivation (4.5%) and agro-forestry (9%) etc. These non-agricultural initiatives are also considered as prospective sectors for generating employment.

Recommendations

Northwestern chars are generally considered as isolated regions where millions of people living with crisis of getting employment opportunities and requisite training for community capacity development. Very few measures have undertaken, yet, by the government, NGOs, and private organizations for creating employment opportunities of char dwellers and their capacity development. Despite existing enormous potentialities within island chars and of vulnerable people, just only lacking of people's capacity and well resources restrict the extreme poor dwellers to initiate employment options and working opportunities. So, it is urgent that all sectors-actors should immediately undertake necessary and effective measures for employment generation in island char areas. In this regard, following initiatives and suggestive planning would be considered as more effective action plan for the sector-actors those who are working on the char development issues particularly for creating employment scope and income earning options:

Initiatives Within the Island Chars

- Providing specific allocation in national budget to create more sustainable employment opportunities for unemployed youth (male & female) and adults of remote island chars in north and north-western Bangladesh
- Government can provide assistance in establishing custom-designed and handloom products (e.g. embroidering, nakshikantha, hat, mat, shalwar-kameez, orrna, sarees, fatua, karchopees, and shirt etc.) and small scale entrepreneurial industries (i.e. the small factories of Chira, moori, corn foods and other food processing industries) in which they can access the marketing of the products within the char areas
- Government should promote livestock farming at char areas where there green grazing fields are available and greater scope for producing green fodder for the cattle
- Promoting the cattle fattening, dairy and poultry production, livestock rearing and poultry production in both households level and farm based which are more potential sectors for char people employment
- Promoting the homestead gardening activities at large scale in char areas where many char women, girls and sometimes male people can be employed
- To initiate training opportunities for small and cottage industries, handicrafts, and handloom products; as if char women and men can get background training for their skill and capacity development
- To initiate training opportunities for small and cottage industries, handicrafts, and handloom products; as if char women and men can get background training for their skill and capacity development

- Motivating private entrepreneurs, local riches, industrialists (those who are originated from relevant upazila and districts), owner of large business, farms (poultry, dairy, bakery), cold storage, handi-crafts and handloom industries as if they employ some char people in their industries or take initiatives to generate employment scope within char areas
- LGED should establish cooperative market for the women to create income generating opportunities in those char areas whose longitudinal sustainability is comparatively better
- Government can provide infrastructural support to the jobless women of island char land in different activities like sewing handloom, Karchupi (doing needlework), tailoring, woolen work etc.
- Government should ensure the improved access to markets of the char dwellers after securing both their firm and off-firm production
- Introduce 'char credit programs' particularly for char dwellers with proper monitoring system and with very low interest rate for using it in the productive activities
- Establishment of seasonal krishi market by the government or the non-government representatives or private initiatives when crops are being reaped and harvested.
- Promoting agriculture in char areas is a potential sector of generating employment for huge number of unemployed people.
- Establishment of hut/bazaar/market in char areas as if char people can buy and sell their daily essentials where some people can be employed or able to initiate small scale business
- Establishment of relevant training centers at nearest part of the char areas or at upazila level as if char women and interested persons can easily obtain these trainings and fight for involving in working sectors
- Ensuring the access of unemployed people to local resources within the chars

4.2. Relevant Government Policies

- Ministry of Social Welfare should increase the allocation, introduce specific quota system and prioritize the char dwellers particularly in government employment generation initiatives under social safety net programs (e.g. 100 days employment opportunities, food for work (Kabikha) and money for work (Kabitha) etc.)
- Ministry of Labour and Employment has significant role in prioritizing poor workless people of island chars in overseas employment (e.g. creating specific quota, picking potential labour forces from chars)
- Ministry of Labour and Employment may have capacity to provide skill development trainings on handicrafts and handloom products, and the products of small and cottage industries to the workless char dwellers particularly for women
- Ministry of Labour and Employment can formulate policy to urge the owners of RMGs (Readymade Garment), pharmaceutical companies, and other small industries etc. as if they prioritize workless island char dwellers in garment sectors
- Establishing skill and capacity development training centres at union level and recruit key resource persons where many youths, unemployed adolescents and adult persons can come to obtain training on potential employment sectors in outside of island chars

- Formulating specific pro-char policies and introduce stimulus packages (e.g. relieve from tax payment) to motivate small and medium entrepreneurs, and industrialists as if they can show interest to set up their industries at island char areas as there are huge amount of jobless people passing their time with leisure
- Government agencies involved in providing credit e.g. krishi bank, Rajshahi Krishi Unnayan Bank and other institutions etc. should enhance their activities and provide credit to the char people with minimum interest,
- Bangladesh Water Development Board should immediately undertake initiatives to excavate the mighty rivers along the char areas as part of increasing the navigation of large water bodies which will be more effective to reduce the disastrous impacts of seasonal flood on char dwellers and also reduce the damage of agricultural crops

Concluding Remarks

It is unanimously cleared that the northwestern char dwellers are the most vulnerable community in Bangladesh who are continually struggling with a number of natural hazards (e.g. seasonal flood, drought, cold wave and river bank erosion) and also with the extreme poverty resulting from the lack of well resources, income earning options and working opportunities etc. Besides, the geo-physical isolation and engendered risks—emanating from the mighty rivers like Padma, Jamuna and Teesta etc. are also inhibiting to catch attention of the government, development partners, industrialists' and private entrepreneurs to develop the infrastructures, roads and transportation, persistent income earning options within the island chars. They have very seldom access to public sector facilities such as health, agriculture, safety net supports, livestock, sanitation, education, and electricity etc. The deprivation is not only evident in these provisions but also it is reflected in the employment generation programs implemented by the state authorities particularly the Ministry of Labour and Employment. To date, very few char dwellers get opportunities in overseas employment programs under the Ministry of Labour and Employment. Probably no training centers are available in char areas, so that educated women and men can enhance their working capacity and develop individual skills which are driving factors for getting employment at outsides of char areas. In addition, employment disparity is also proved in other employment programs of the government particularly in Kabikha, Kabitha and 100 days employment programs etc. where char people have scarcely been employed. If we see to the distributive pattern of government services in mainland, we find that though most of the mainland dwellers are comparatively less poverty prone and have additional earning sources but they get more priority in all state services including employment programs. As most of the chars are prone to river bank erosion, so to date, probably no private organizations and small entrepreneurs have shown interest to implement their programs or establish some industries in char areas. Under the above circumstances, extreme poor char dwellers are forced to work within the char areas particularly in labor force activities such as work in agriculture field, brick field, earth work, van or rickshaw puller, mason, beggar, hawker, handicrafts, and handloom work etc. But, most of the time around the year they are remain workless and don't have any decent income earning options. Then, they obliged to go out another district or upazila in search of work/employment and earning money to support their family where they face severe disparity in terms of wages, work and decent living standard. Besides, the women of island chars are not carrying out their productive activities due to the lack of enough financial capacity, technical knowledge and proper skills.

If we want to achieve, however, the Millennium Development Goal (MDG)-1, we have to ensure the access to Decent Employment for Women, Men, and Young People (Target 1B), and in this regard, immediate attention should pay to the extreme poor dwellers who are living at isolated island chars with severe lacking of employment opportunities and requisite resources' to get standard work. If we want to do so, all sector-actors including relevant ministries of government bodies, non-government agencies, development organizations, small and large entrepreneurs, donor agencies, and local tycoon etc. have to take necessary initiatives and attempts (some prospective attempts describe in recommendations sections) for creating the employment opportunities and properly trained up island char people as part of their skill and capacity development. At the same time, they have to undertake necessary measures to eradicate the existing constraints particularly geographical and natural to employment generation in island chars. Apart from these measures, all attempts taken for ameliorating the living standard and reducing the risk and vulnerability resulted from internal geo-physical and socio-natural factors would be hampered, which may further raise the question of food security, social safety, decent income options, and freeing the millions from poverty, hunger and malnutrition.

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**ASSESSMENT OF
WATSAN VULNERABILITY
ON THE CLIMATE CHANGE
IMPACTED 'HOTSPOTS'**



ASSESSMENT OF WATSAN VULNERABILITY ON THE CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTED 'HOTSPOTS'

Arif Abdullah Khan, Programme Manager, WaterAid Bangladesh

Executive Summary

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world in terms of climate change; and the effect of climate-related hazards such as floods, storm surges, saline intrusion and droughts on safe drinking water is a growing concern. In order to assess the potential impact of climate change on the availability of fresh water, WaterAid has organized this WATSAN program to help formulate strategies that can be applied to the rural areas of Bangladesh.

WATSAN Status

The MDG target set for safe drinking water and sanitation for Bangladesh aims to halve the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation by 2015. Though the availability (as of 2009) of drinking water is satisfactory (97.6% availability), not much progress has been made since 2006 (97.4% availability). On top of that, BSS 2009 found that only 62% of households on average had hygienic latrines; 30% had unhygienic latrine provisions and 8% did not use any latrines (BBS, 2011). It is evident that Bangladesh still has some way to go in achieving the Drinking Water and Sanitation MDG target.

The Effect of Natural and Socioeconomic Vulnerability on WATSAN

Water and sanitation facilities and technologies are sensitive to climatic hazards. Monsoon floods, cyclone-induced storm surges, water stress (due to rainfall scarcity in the dry season), salinity intrusion and riverbank erosion all factor into the physical vulnerability of an area and have the potential to impact WATSAN negatively.

Moreover, the socio-economic vulnerability of certain social groups– such as women, young dependents, the elderly and the unprivileged– factor into WATSAN assessments. Management and technological adaptation options need to be proposed based on the present institutional or/and legislative framework, and adapted in common and sustainable ways for these regions.

Zoning in Different Regions

Since WaterAid requires upazila-wise risk assessment in different hydrological regions (newly developed under this study) and suitable technological adaptation options, Bangladesh has been divided into five regions for research purposes (without splitting the upazila boundaries): North West, North Central, Extended North East, Extended Coastal Zone and Eastern Hills.

Physical Risk Assessment

North West Region

Monsoon floods, water stress and riverbank erosion are the main natural hazards that affect present and future water supplies and sanitation conditions in this region. At present, 106 upazilas are at medium risk and 20 upazilas are at low risk; future conditions are expected to be improved by making 81 upazilas medium-risk and 45 upazilas low-risk by 2050. There are no upazilas are under high risk.

North Central Region

Monsoon floods, water stress and riverbank erosion are the natural hazards that affect present and future water supply and sanitation in this region. At present, 76 upazilas are at medium risk and 22 upazilas are at low risk. Future conditions are not expected to change much with 77 upazilas at medium risk and 21 upazilas at low risk. There are no upazilas is at high risk at present, nor are they expected to be so in the future.

Extended North East Region

Floods and riverbank erosion are the natural hazards that affect present and future water supply and sanitation in this region. At present, 61 upazilas are at medium risk and 31 upazilas are at low risk. There may be a slight increase in future risk with 69 upazilas at medium risk and 23 upazilas at low risk by 2050. There are no upazilas is at high risk at present, nor are they expected to be so in the future.

Extended Coastal Zone

Storm surges, salinity intrusion, floods, water stress and riverbank erosion are the natural hazards that affect present and future water supply and sanitation in this region. This area is highly prone to water and sanitation problems. At present, 71 upazilas are at high risk, 74 are at medium risk and 47 are at low risk. Future projections show a reduction in high-risk areas, with their number falling to 64. However there will be an increase in medium-risk areas to 92 upazilas and low-risk areas to 32 upazilas by 2050.

Since this study has been fully based on secondary data and no secondary data of selected hazards is available for the Eastern Hills, physical risk assessment has been impossible for this region.

Social Risk Assessment

Social risks for WATSAN have been assessed using data from three main vulnerable groups:

- i) Female (gender ratio)
- ii. The underprivileged (below lower poverty line)
- iii. Dependents (children, aged people and pregnant women).

A total of 227 upazilas are at high risk in terms of social vulnerability; 233 upazilas are at medium risk and 47 upazilas are at low risk.

Adaptation Strategies

Two types of adaptation options have been suggested for both water supply and sanitation: management-oriented and technological.

Water Supply

The management-oriented strategies for drinking water supply emphasize on institutional strengthening, community participation and awareness, empowerment of women, reuse and efficient use of water and water resource assessment. Several technologies are recommended for different regions based on their effectiveness in combating the local present and probable hazards. For example, technologies like piped systems, raised deep tube wells and No. 6 tara pumps have been suggested for the North West Region; piped systems and rainwater harvesting schemes (RHS) have been suggested for the North Central Region; and piped systems, raised deep tube wells, rainwater harvesting schemes (RHS), infiltration galleries, No. 6 tara pumps and protected dug wells have been recommended for the Extended North East Region. Since the Extended Coastal Zone is a high risk area for different types of natural hazards, a wide variety of technologies have been suggested: piped systems, raised deep tube wells, rainwater harvesting schemes (RHS), pond sand filters (PSF), shrouded shallow tube wells (VSST) and protected dug wells. Technologies like piped systems, rainwater harvesting schemes (RHS), gravity feed systems (GFS), infiltration galleries and springs/ghiri are appropriate for the Eastern Hills.

Sanitation

Management options such as institutional strengthening, community participation and focus on gender issues are essential for ensuring improved sanitation. The establishment of suitable sanitation technologies is also in high demand. Earth-stabilized raised pit latrines, step latrines, mound latrines and community latrines are a few of the technologies recommended for both North West and North Central Regions. Earth-stabilized raised pit latrines, step latrines, mound latrines, sand-enveloped latrines, sand-enveloped raised latrines and community latrines have been recommended for both the Extended North East Region and the Extended Coastal Zone. Community latrines have been suggested for the Eastern Hills.

RAINFALL, FOOD SECURITY AND HUMAN MOBILITY: A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH



RAINFALL, FOOD SECURITY AND HUMAN MOBILITY: A CASE STUDY OF BANGLADESH

Authors: **Ahsan Uddin Ahmed, Selim Reza Hassan, Benjamin Etzold
Sharmind Neelormi**

Introduction

Global climate change and induced effects on weather patterns have been causing problems for human systems across the globe, especially for food production and the livelihoods of poor people who depend directly on natural resources. The highly complex relationships between climate change, particularly in terms of rainfall variability and shifting seasons, rural livelihoods, food security, social inequality and migration are, however, not well understood. In a bid to investigate these linkages and to inform policy-makers about the implications of climate change on people's livelihoods, food insecurity and migration, the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security (UNU-EHS) and CARE International have jointly carried out empirical research in eight countries across the globe. As a part of this effort, Bangladesh has been selected for a case study, because it is one of the countries that are most severely affected by climate change.

The Specific Objectives of the Study are to:

1. Understand the relationship between changing rainfall variability and shifting seasons, rural livelihoods, food security, social inequalities and different forms of human mobility;
2. Assess the potential for climate change to become a driver of migration and displacement in the future;
3. Enable a range of stakeholders to influence policies, plans and practical interventions about climate change and human mobility.

This report presents evidence from an empirical field study jointly undertaken by CARE Bangladesh and the Centre for Global Change in the Kurigram district in the north-west of Bangladesh. The study applied both quantitative and qualitative methods, blended with secondary sources, to reveal the above-mentioned links. The quantitative data has been collected through a structured questionnaire survey involving 150 households (HHs). Participatory research methods such as focus group discussions (FGDs) as well as expert interviews (EIs) have been employed to develop a deeper understanding of the local people's vulnerability to environmental changes and in particular to rainfall variability.

Rainfall Variability

The analysis reveals that the study area has been experiencing no significant changes in total monsoon rainfall. However, a distinct increase in rainfall variability throughout the rainy season (April to October) has been found in the area, together with changes in the microstructure of rainfall patterns. The latter is manifested in the bimodal distribution of rainfall occurrence instead of the usual single peak distribution, and a reduction of overall rainfall during an October phenomenon called Kaitan Satao that involves intense rainfall. The scientific findings clearly provide evidence of changing rainfall patterns in the study areas, which are duly supported by the local people's perception of changes: 93% of the people interviewed noted a decline in overall rainfall, but nonetheless a longer rainy season (98% noted). Three-quarters of respondents mentioned an increase in drought and untimely dry spells, two-thirds (65% of HHs) noted more extreme events, and half reported more heavy rains than normal. An overwhelming majority can no longer distinguish the six seasons that have been common in the past.

Since rainfall plays a significant role for the livelihoods of the poor, such changes disturb the seasonal production cycle of the poor and threaten their livelihood security. Two major livelihood groups are particularly affected. Poor farmers with small land-holdings have difficulty coping with the changes in rainfall patterns as their food production is further declining, which increases their food insecurity. Similarly, the already weakened livelihoods of fishermen are facing an additional challenge due to changes in rainfall behaviour and flooding.

Food Insecurity

The evidence presented shows that people in the Kurigram district perceive climatic variability and change as severe risks to their livelihoods and their food security, in terms of availability, access to, and the utilization of food. Advancements in the rice-based agricultural production system have been achieved in the north-west of Bangladesh in recent years. Such advancements have been complemented by governmental support in the forms of food and employment programmes. Despite these programmes, the poor and the extremely poor HHs have become increasingly vulnerable to food insecurity. Their livelihoods are highly sensitive to changing rainfall patterns and most of them do not have the adequate capacity to cope with these changes and overcome their negative effects. While more affluent farmers with a lot of land can cope with erratic or diminishing rainfall by employing irrigation, thus achieving an appreciable harvest, the agricultural-based HHs with smaller landholdings cannot afford irrigation and are more vulnerable to rainfall variability.

The extremely poor to the lower-middle classes are particularly sensitive to seasonal food insecurity (locally known as the Monga phenomenon occurring in September and October). HHs with large landholdings do not suffer from seasonal food shortages. Food insecurity among non-agricultural HHs is more prevalent than among agricultural-based HHs, because the wage labourers are hit particularly hard by the lack of employment in the lean season. People in the Kurigram district employ a plethora of strategies to cope with (seasonal) food insecurity: they opt for less expensive (generally, non-protein based) food, they limit their food consumption; some even reduce their food intake to a bare minimum, go hungry and often borrow food items. Almost all such (negative) coping strategies are found to have a detrimental effect on people's nutrition and health. While most food insecure HHs cannot send out a family member to work elsewhere during the Monga due to the low labour demand at the most important potential destinations, income earning opportunities – mostly in the agricultural sector – increase during the post-Monga period.

Migration

People have been migrating from Kurigram since the early 1970s. Since then, both the absolute number of migrants and the rate of participation in labour migration have risen. Members of almost half of the HHs interviewed seek employment in agricultural regions and other cities with a high demand for labour in order to earn a cash-income and thereby diversify their livelihoods. In the study region, migration is predominantly male, temporary, internal and rural-to-rural; the latter point being a contrast to other studies on migration and climate change in Bangladesh that focus on rural-to-urban migration. Social inequality in the villages is reflected in the migration patterns: the comparatively most affluent HHs do not have to migrate as they can secure a steady supply of food throughout the year. Some of them, however, do migrate to Dhaka or Rangpur due to better wages in the formal urban economy or to take advantage of higher education or better health care facilities in the cities. The lower-middle class and the poor are particularly dependent on seasonal out-migration. Members of these social groups seek employment as agricultural wage labourers in other regions in Bangladesh, in particular in Munishganj and Feni, as this does not require more than the farming skills that they already possess. Their lack of technical skills, however, limits their opportunities to earn a higher income. The extremely poor cannot even afford the costs of temporary migration. Most of them also lack the necessary access to migration networks. Comparatively few women from Kurigram have the option to migrate to improve their own livelihoods. Prevalent social norms, women's sense of uncertainty regarding the employment types and destination areas, fear of harassment and social exclusion are the prime reasons for a low rate of female migration.

Migration has distinct social costs. Generally, the male heads of HHs or adult sons migrate in search of employment. It is found that women pay a heavy toll when the men have left. Not only do they have to work harder to sustain their family's food security, they also have to carry out an extra workload to pay off the debts their husbands have left. Moreover, many women and adolescent girls face harassment and even sexual abuse in the absence of the HH's men. Nonetheless, the advantages of seasonal labour migration seem to outweigh its negative effects. The increase in mobile phones, improved road networks and the services of migration entrepreneurs who facilitate migration and provide access to labour in other agrarian regions, have made temporary migration easier in recent years. One might even argue that a distinct agrarian labour migration system or a culture of seasonal migration has emerged.

In northern Bangladesh, climate change, that is, increasing rainfall variability and more frequently occurring natural hazards, affects people's agricultural production and thus their food security. Although most people would like to stay in their ancestral homes, given the growing and increasingly diversified national economy and people's need to cope with food insecurity and the adverse effects of climate change, an increase in seasonal out-migration from the Kurigram district is highly likely. Overall, the case study from Kurigram shows clear links between rainfall variability, food and livelihood security, and migration. Temporary labour migration has the potential to ameliorate the (seasonal) food insecurity of the rural poor and the income earned by the migrants helps to buffer the effects of rainfall variability. The relationships between these variables are, however, nuanced and require careful further analysis.

Policy Recommendations

Policymakers at different levels – from the district to the national, and from the regional to the global level – need to be informed of the complex implications of climate change on people’s livelihoods, their food insecurity and subsequent migration patterns. In Bangladesh, the successes towards eradicating poverty and hunger that have been achieved in the past two decades are in danger of being counteracted by climate change. Future potential is thus threatened, too. Recognizing the everyday lives of rural people in Bangladesh and reflecting upon the key findings of this study, a number of policy recommendations are formulated. Some of these recommendations may appear generic for the country as a whole, while a few are specific for the case study area.

People’s sensitivity to rainfall variability, especially the extremely poor and the poor, needs to be reduced and their food security needs to be enhanced. Efforts must be made to improve the planted crop varieties and agricultural practices in order to protect livelihoods and ensure food security. New varieties of hazard-resistant crops need to be introduced and made available to all local people. Efforts must also be made to develop crops with high nutritional value that are simultaneously “climate safe”. It is recommended that newly-introduced crop varieties and essential agricultural input should be made “fair” in terms of their prices. Revised and strengthened incentive packages should be designed and facilitated that enable the poor to enhance their own food production, and thereby their competitiveness. “Integrated pest management” should be given incentives so that the excessive use of harmful chemicals does not destroy open-water fisheries.

Poor and marginalized farmers should be supported in diversifying their sources of living and finding alternatives to agriculture. More opportunities for gainful employment in the Kurigram district – in particular also for women – will improve the local people’s access to food. Their adaptive capacity to live with hazards and rainfall variability should be enhanced. Better early warning and messaging systems need to be developed and implemented. Further efforts must be made to gradually enhance people’s adaptive capacity as well as to reduce their sensitivity to sudden-onset climate hazards as well as to variability-related climate risks. The adaptive capacity of the poor can indeed be enhanced by building human capital (through skill enhancement and training), physical capital (by building adaptive infrastructure, etc.), natural capital (by enhancing and creating poor people’s access to common property regimes) and through systematic investment in social development processes.

There is need to continue the focus on education and targeting of poor and extremely poor HHs in terms of access to education and social safety-net (SSN) programmes in order to improve their social and economic chances in the future. The respective families require improved incentives to invest in their children’s education. Further investments into the existing disaster risk reduction mechanisms are necessary so that – in case of a natural hazard – people’s losses can be minimized and the erosion of their assets can be stopped.

It is necessary to facilitate migration rather than to fight it in a bid to provide a better chance for the poor and the extremely poor to avoid hunger. Migration should not be seen as “failure of adaptation” and discouraged, but rather as an “adequate way of adaptation” and supported. Since the extremely poor people’s lack of resources is the key barrier to their ability to migrate, micro-credits and available financial instruments could be developed further in order to assist them in migrating. The aspiring poor need to acquire skills so that they can find gainful employment, optimally in the growing urban economy rather than in the agriculture sector, which might be affected by climate change, too. State-run programmes might have to be realigned, with particular focus on the nation’s climate change “hotspots” so that the most vulnerable, including women and artisan fishers (who have no other skills), also find better conditions to apply their knowledge and skills elsewhere.

The vulnerability of migrants’ HHs must be recognized and reduced at both ends – in the migrants’ home villages and at their places of destination. The rights of labour migrants need be strengthened and their working and living conditions must be improved at the destinations. The protection of both female mi-grants and the women left at home needs special attention. The social costs borne by the female members of the migrants’ HHs must be taken care of through the involvement of local govern-ment institutions and the strict implementation of legal regimes

CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESILIENT LIVELIHOODS: CLP'S APPROACH TO REDUCING THE VULNERABILITY OF THE EXTREME POOR IN THE RIVERINE ISLANDS OF NORTH-WEST BANGLADESH



Climate Change and Resilient Livelihoods: CLP's Approach to Reducing the Vulnerability of the Extreme Poor in the Riverine Islands of North-West Bangladesh

Author: **Matthew Pritchard**; Team Leader, Chars Livelihoods Programme

Co-Authors: **Stuart Kenward**; Innovation, Monitoring, Learning and
Communications (IMLC) Director, Chars Livelihoods Programme

Maksud Hannan; IMLC Unit Manager, Chars Livelihoods Programme

Abstract

The extremely poor people that live in the chars (riverine islands) of north-west Bangladesh face a wide range of vulnerabilities. Many of these are exacerbated by the changes steadily being identified as the result of climate change. Floods; erosion; lack of access to water, sanitation, basic services; livelihoods that are easily disrupted by disasters; gender-related discrimination; all of these and more are faced by tens of thousands of households living on the chars. Even with hard work and resilience, an erosion event caused by a record-breaking flood can set a family's livelihood and standard of living back by years. Some households simply never recover, living their lives around or even below the extreme poor poverty line.

Climate change is causing a variety of changes to the vulnerabilities that the extreme poor in the chars live with. Flooding, a regular challenge, may become more frequent, more severe and less predictable. Rains may fall earlier, or later; there is likely to be more rain, but sometimes less; and while average temperatures may go up, there may also be harsher and more prolonged periods of cold.

All of these changes highlight the pressing need for resilient livelihoods and reductions in the vulnerabilities that the extreme poor face. CLP's approach to reducing these challenges and promoting resilient livelihoods centres around a multi-sectoral approach to tackle the physical, social and economic impacts of climate change.

On the physical infrastructure side, CLP raises plinths for participants – mounds of engineered earth to get them up off the river bottom. Participants are then provided with improved water supplies and hygienic latrines. Their livelihoods are supported through asset transfers and stipends, as well as support in improved livestock-rearing methods and other diversification activities such as homestead gardens, pit crops and chicken-rearing. A markets component aims to assist entrepreneurial farmers to link more effectively with local markets and further improve their production techniques. Village Savings and Loans Groups help give participants a safe place to save as well as a place to borrow at reasonable interest rates.

Social development activities help improve the standing of the extreme poor in their communities as well as promote messages around water, sanitation and hygiene, particularly becoming an “open-defecation-free” community. The laws against dowry are highlighted, as are the negative effects of early and child marriage. Health workers are trained and local community clinics are held to improve the health status of communities that have often never had formal, modern healthcare services. Village Development Committees (VDCs) take a frontline in many of these activities and are supported to become sustainable village-level development activist organisations, linking in with local government and other stakeholders such as local NGOs.

A comprehensive monitoring and evaluation programme collects data on all aspects of CLP’s work, illustrating that the approach works and has good sustainability. This evidence suggests that the CLP’s model is potentially replicable to other communities that face similar climate change-related vulnerabilities.

Paper

Introduction

The extremely poor people that live in the chars (riverine islands) of north-west Bangladesh face a wide range of vulnerabilities. Some are related to the simple challenges facing any population that is extremely poor: hunger; poor health; limited income-generating opportunities; lack of basic services such as education; poor infrastructure and sanitation facilities; little influence or ‘voice’ in the community or other power structures; and so on.

Further challenges come from the specific circumstances of living in and among the great and shifting rivers of the Bangladesh delta. Floods; erosion; lack of access to water and sanitation; geographical remoteness leading to lack of access to other basic services; gender-based discrimination; and livelihoods that are easily disrupted by disasters; all of these and more are faced by tens of thousands of households living on the chars.

Many of these challenges are exacerbated by the changes steadily being identified as the result of climate change, leading to chars-dwellers’ vulnerabilities changing and deepening. Women and people living with a disability are more likely to live in extreme poverty and experience worse vulnerability than average. The changes to overall societal-level vulnerabilities will undoubtedly impact these groups hardest.

Flooding, a regular challenge, may become more frequent, more severe and less predictable. Since 1984 there have been six major flooding events, and some indications that they are becoming more regular¹.

¹ Ministry of Environment and Forestry, 2009

Apart from the risk of flooding, such events often have a serious impact on agricultural production. This affects chars-dwellers in at least two ways: price rises for food; and drops in household income as the demand for agricultural labour reduces.

Chars-dwellers are always at risk of erosion, i.e. when the riverine island on which they live is entirely washed away by the flooding river. Many families report having experienced several erosion events in their lifetime; one older lady reported to the author that she had moved due to erosion over 30 times in her life.

Even with hard work and resilience, an erosion event caused by a record-breaking flood can set a family's livelihood and standard of living back by years. Some households simply never recover, living their lives around or even below the extreme poor poverty line.

Rains may fall earlier, or later; there is likely to be more rain, but sometimes less. These uncertainties again impact on the agricultural calendar and production, with knock-on effects on prices and demand for labour.

Although chars-dwellers live among rivers, nevertheless the north-west of Bangladesh is more prone to periods of drought than other parts of the country. These may become more prolonged in the future, putting pressure on groundwater supplies.

While average temperatures may go up, there may also be harsher and more prolonged periods of cold. For the extreme poor in the chars, particularly the young, the old, and others that have vulnerabilities from poor health, the cold snaps in the winter can be deadly. Most poor chars-dwellers' houses are not built for the cold. Fuel for warmth is expensive when you are extremely poor; some families can afford only the most basic of winter clothing, while others have none. More extreme weather patterns will undoubtedly impact heavily on the extreme poor.

All of these changes highlight the pressing need for resilient livelihoods and reductions in the vulnerabilities that the extreme poor face. The Chars Livelihoods Programme's (CLP) approach to reducing these challenges and promoting resilient livelihoods centres around a multi-sectoral approach to tackle the physical, economic, social and institutional impacts of climate change.

The Chars Livelihoods Programme

The first phase of the Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP) began in 2004. After about a year, it was recognised that the initial design was flawed, as it focused too heavily on trying to work with local governments that had little capacity to deliver the results required.

As a result, it was redesigned and the "CLP Package" was delivered to 55,000 extreme poor households in four phases (called Cohorts) from 2006 to 2010. It was estimated that up to 900,000 individuals benefited from some aspect of CLP-1, given that some assistance projects had a community focus (Maxwell Stamp 2010). It worked on chars in five districts: Kurigram, Gaibandha, Jamalpur, Bogra and Sirajganj.

The Chars Livelihoods Programme Phase 2 began in April 2010 and will complete in March 2016. It targets approximately 78,000 households; about 23% of the households (HHs) estimated to live permanently on the chars (CLP-2 pers. comm. 2014).

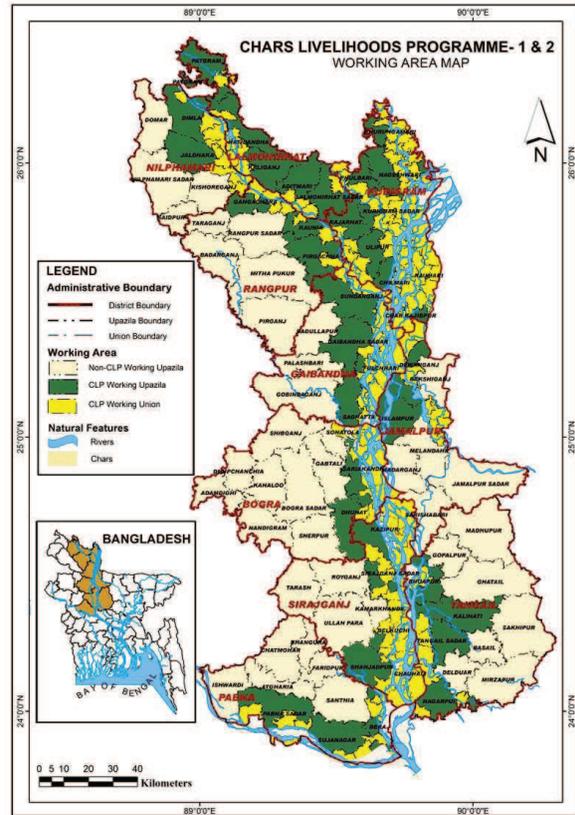
Phase 2's geographical remit includes the Districts of Rangpur, Lalmonhirat, Nilphamari, Pabna and Tangail. Approximately 34% of households in CLP-2 operational districts are estimated to meet CLP's selection criteria (i.e. they are extremely poor).

CLP's support is provided to adult females, even where they are not the household head. This is because:

- many adult males are migratory labourers, sometimes returning to the marital home for only a few weeks per year, therefore being unavailable to look after assets, attend training sessions and so on;
- females are therefore often de facto heads of household;
- giving assets and training to women is intended to foster women's empowerment to counter some perceived negative aspects of traditional male-dominated culture in the chars, such as gender-based violence, discrimination against women, dowry and lack of 'voice' for females.

CLP's 'core package of assistance' is provided to participants for an average of 20 months. It comprises the following components:

- The Asset Transfer Project: provides a grant of Tk17,500 (approximately £142) to female participants to purchase an income-generating asset. The grant cannot be spent on consumption or other items, it must be used for an asset that can generate income. The vast majority of participants - over 98% - select cattle. Stipends are also provided to support family consumption and prevent the asset being sold if times turn hard for the family. The asset support stipend of Tk 400 (about £3.25) is provided for six months, while the family support stipend of Tk 350 (about £2.84) is provided for the full period of CLP assistance – usually around 20 months. A comprehensive curriculum of training in livestock management is provided throughout CLP's period of support.
- CLP supports Livestock Service Providers (LSPs) through capacity-building to provide much-needed para-vet services on the chars. Although not full veterinarians, the LSPs are trained in how to diagnose and treat common livestock illnesses on the chars. As private sector actors, once CLP completes its assistance, they continue to visit communities to offer services, making their income from sales of drugs and other inputs.
- Raising plinths (engineered mounds of earth protected by grass and other plant cover) for protection from floods. The plinths, which are usually



constructed by members of the local community under CLP's Infrastructure Employment Project (IEP), are built to be at least 60cm above the highest known flood level in the area.

- Participant households receive subsidies to install improved water sources, and all village households are assisted to construct sanitary latrines, whether or not they are Core Participant Households (CPHHs).
- Fortnightly health clinics are provided. As well as primary healthcare and family planning services, CLP provides deworming tablets, iron/folic acid tablets for pregnant or lactating women, and micronutrient supplements to children.
- Char Shasthya Karmis (CSKs), or Village Health Workers, are also supported through capacity-building. Like the LSPs, these CSKs are trained in providing basic health services and can provide common non-prescription medications. They also continue to provide community-based health services once CLP completes its work.
- Given that most participants choose cattle as their asset, the livestock market and value chain is a critical component of a livelihood. The CLP implements a market development project focused on the meat and milk markets, with the aim of linking small-scale producers with both input providers and buyers. Along with training in better livestock production practices, the aim is to promote efficient commercial approaches to livestock rearing, milk production and marketing so that the markets work better for people on the chars.
- CLP provides support for diversification of livelihoods, through the provision of materials and training in homestead gardening as well as pit crops. Participants can also invest any leftover amounts from the Asset Transfer Grant in other income-generating assets such as small-stock or poultry. Poultry vaccinators and Model Rearers are also supported to provide services and demonstration plots to improve poultry rearing and management techniques.
- The CLP aims to raise the awareness of char people on a number of social issues, particularly: the status of women and the importance of supporting their empowerment; reducing the practice of dowry and early marriage; promoting healthy hygiene practices; and raising awareness on how to access government services. Each CLP participant attends a weekly social development group meeting throughout the 18-month programme.
- CLP's Partnerships Division aims to bring additional goods and services providers to chars dwellers. For example, CLP has recently connected some of its implementing partners with corporate social responsibility funders to provide additional water points for chars-based families.

Addressing Physical Vulnerabilities

The principal physical vulnerabilities facing char households include flooding, drought and erosion. Climate change is likely to compound the situation by making rainfall patterns more unpredictable and possibly more intense. It may also bring periods of lower-than-usual rainfall.

Flooding in the chars creates great disruption and discomfort. Depending on the severity, households may have to temporarily migrate to raised land on the mainland, or on the char if they are "lucky". Assets such as livestock are at risk and, if the household is obliged to temporarily migrate to the

mainland, theft becomes a real issue. Hygiene also becomes a problem with some households having to practice open defecation as their latrines become inundated. Water points are also often submerged by flood waters.

CLP has responded by raising households on earthen plinths two feet (0.6 metres) above the highest-known flood level in the village. During the first phase of the Programme 90,000 households were raised; during CLP 2 a further 77,000 households have been targeted, benefiting a total of 670,000 char households.

Being raised on a plinth, the household is able to remain dry, protect their assets and remain on the char throughout the year. The plinth also offers protection to neighbours whose plinths have been inundated. Social capital is thus strengthened.

During January 2015 the Programme conducted a study to assess the performance of these plinths, including those that had been raised several years ago. The results of the study show that:

- 80% of households surveyed are still living on the plinth provided by CLP;
- Less than 4% of households experienced flooding after receiving CLP support, compared to over 97% before;
- After receiving CLP support, many fewer CPHHs reported having to deal with the typical problems associated with the seasonal floods, such as moving house (69% less), needing to rebuild/repair their house (88% less), facing problems with cooking (96% less) and finding safe drinking water (82% less);
- Just 17% of CLP 1 CPHHs (i.e. those who received their plinth between 4 and 10 years ago) experienced erosion of their CLP plinth. The vast majority of CLP plinths remain intact over time and continue to protect households years after being constructed.

Floods also inundate latrines and water points, unless they are raised above the flood line, creating hygiene issues and the risk of disease.

The Programme helps to address these water and sanitation-related issues. CLP upgrades or constructs new water points, all of which are raised above the highest-known flood level to ensure year-round access to water from an improved water source. This helps during floods, but will also assist the family during droughts. With regards to the problem of open defecation CLP takes a community-wide approach. Both core and non-core households are offered a subsidy to construct a sanitary latrine which, importantly is also raised above the highest-known flood level. This reduces the need to practice open defecation during floods.

Another important area where the Programme builds the resilience of households and communities against floods, erosion etc. is through community mobilisation and knowledge transfer. While receiving CLP support, female participants attend Social Development group meetings for the entire 18 month period. At these meetings participants are taught a variety of modules including disaster preparedness.

This module covers multiple hazards including floods, cyclones and fires. These meetings along with other CLP organised meetings (Village Development Committees (VDCs); Adolescent Groups; Couples Orientation; and Men's Training) increase social capital, creating stronger links within villages, allowing for a better coordinated response to disasters.

A recent study, published by the Programme, found that the char communities where CLP had provided support had significantly greater disaster resilience than the control communities. Key findings from the study include:

- CLP dramatically improves the overall disaster resilience of communities in Disaster Preparedness and Response; Knowledge and Education; Governance; and Risk Assessment.
- Women's disaster resilience is greater than men after receiving CLP support.
- Plinths are a vital component of CLP's support.

While the Programme accepts that erosion will happen in the chars, given the size and nature of the rivers that cause it, nevertheless CLP aims to protect its plinths. The sides of the plinth are planted with grasses and other vegetation, including useful crops such as fodder for participants' cattle and fruit trees. The Programme does not invest in high risk areas of the chars. Those areas that are known for regular and intense flooding are avoided and families encouraged to live elsewhere, if feasible.

Ultimately, the best long-term protection from the negative effects of erosion is economic development. The CLP's asset transfer project aims to economically empower households so that they have the resources to respond appropriately when erosion occurs.

Addressing Economic Vulnerabilities

Significant economic vulnerabilities affecting extreme poor households on the chars are associated with the limited employment opportunities and seasonal fluctuations in demand for employment. Once again, climate change is likely to compound these constraints. Droughts, erratic rainfall and prolonged floods could negatively impact the agriculture sector on which extreme poor households depend so much for their livelihoods.

Historically, the chars have provided grazing grounds for livestock, but have relatively recently become more intensively farmed with crops such as rice, jute, maize, and wheat. The large pockets of extreme poor living on the chars rely heavily on earning their income from agricultural wage labour in and around the chars. When work dries up, however (for example between October and December during the lean season), they are obliged to migrate in search of work.

The CLP aims to diversify and strengthen the livelihoods of 78,000 extreme poor households (equivalent to 0.3 million people) by allowing the female head of the household to select a productive asset (currently valued at Taka 17,500; GBP 145). The vast majority (98%) select cattle for meat production or for dairy. This grant allows the household to grow and diversify its asset base. For example, on entry to the Programme, average household productive assets are valued at just Taka 1,675 (GBP 14). This rises substantially to Taka 51,626 (GBP 429) after CLP support has ended. Participants are also trained in cultivating household garden and pit crops, which can either be consumed or sold for income.

With diversified assets and incomes, households need rely less on having to sell their labour, making them less prone to seasonal income fluctuations. Through its internal monitoring and evaluation system, CLP has found that on average the proportion of income from wage labour reduces from around 75% when households enter the Programme to between 37 and 49% after support has ended. Similarly, the proportion of household income from agricultural production increases from close to 0% to between 20-25% after CLP support ends. Such diversified income sources are crucial in reducing risk and helping households cope with shocks such as erosion.

Addressing Social and Institutional Vulnerabilities

Generally speaking, the chars are remote and inaccessible. Whilst many are stable and have been in existence for decades, others are less stable and in a state of flux. For this reason the chars population is relatively under-served with basic services such as schools, clinics, government extension services, safety nets etc. The private sector is also relatively more averse to investing in the chars as compared to the mainland.

Climate change is, once again, likely to compound such issues. Greater erosion and flooding will make the chars more inaccessible and more risky to invest in.

In response, CLP has introduced a range of interventions. CLP has a Partnership Division tasked with lobbying the Government, non-government and private sector actors to invest and provide basic services in the chars. There have been some notable successes; for example Brac are now providing health services in many phased-out CLP area.

The Programme has also established village development committees (VDC). Comprising female and male members of the community, the VDCs are formed with the aim of improving social cohesion and to provide an organisation that can lobby local government for better service provision. VDCs have been involved in various success stories: some have helped older members claim pensions or other grants; others have organised the local community to create or improve local infrastructure; and one even helped start a primary school for local children.

CLP also aims to strengthen markets in the meat and dairy sectors. Whilst not specifically targeting the extreme poor, they are likely to benefit e.g. through improved access to inputs and markets to sell their produce. CLP's markets projects have succeeded in linking established market players with chars-based producers, particularly regarding milk production and distribution. The meat markets arena has also seen valuable improvements in both production techniques and linkages to local meat markets.

Less Vulnerable and Moving Out of Extreme Poverty

This paper has explained how CLP provides an integrated package of support that contributes to reducing the physical, economic, social and institutional vulnerabilities of extreme poor households; vulnerabilities which will be heightened with changes in the global climate.

In a less vulnerable position from floods, fluctuations in the demand for labour etc., extreme poor households are in a stronger position to lift themselves out of extreme poverty and cope with the increasing challenges that climate change will undoubtedly bring their way.

During the last ten years, CLP's Innovation, Monitoring, Learning and Communications Division has generated the evidence base to show that this integrated package of support is effective in lifting households out of extreme poverty.

The Programme collects information from a sample of CPHHs on a range of important and inter-related indicators that can be grouped around the following themes: livelihoods, WASH, women's empowerment, food security and nutrition. Rather than defining whether a household has been lifted out of extreme poverty based on income alone, which has methodological issues and over-simplifies poverty in the chars, CLP has developed a set of graduation criteria.

The Programme's graduation criteria relate to the multiple dimensions of poverty (Table 1). To graduate, a household must meet (any) six or more criteria within 3 months of completing the 18 month cycle. These criteria relate to 1) Income/ expenditure/ consumption 2) Nutrition 3) Asset base 4) Status of females 5) Vulnerability and 6) Access to services.

Table 1: CLP's Graduation Criteria

Domain	Indicators
Income / expenditure/ consumption	1. Household has had more than one source of income during the last 30 days
	2. Household achieves 'acceptable' food consumption score
Nutrition	3. Household has access to improved water
	4. Household has access to a sanitary latrine (meeting all sub -criteria)
	5. Presence of ash/ soap near to water point or latrine
Asset base	6. Productive assets worth more than Tk 30,000
Status of females	7. Participant is able to influence household decisions regarding sale/ purchase of large investments e.g. cattle
Vulnerability	8. Homestead is above known flood level
	9. Household has cash savings more than Tk 3,000
Access to services	10. Household has membership of social group

The Programme has found that 85% of households from cohorts 2.1 to 2.4² had graduated at the end of the 18 month cycle of support. This is equivalent to 43,156 households and 167,877 people. Data from the control group, currently Cohort 2.5, shows that, predictably enough, no households meet six of ten graduation criteria when they join the CLP.

Criteria that are being met by the vast majority of CPHHs at the end of the 18 month cycle are:

- Household eats three meals a day AND consumes five or more food groups in the past week
- Presence of ash/ soap near to water point or latrine
- Household has membership of social group

Graduation criteria being met by relatively fewer households at the end of the 18 month cycle are:

- Household has cash savings of more than Tk 3,000
- Household has access to improved water
- Productive assets worth more than Tk 30,000

The Programme has also found that these rates of graduation are sustainable. For example, at least two-thirds of participants that joined CLP2 in 2010 still meet graduation criteria³ (Kenward S et al, 2014).

Conclusion

Through the infrastructure component, asset transfer project and social development projects, CLP is able to help extreme poor households living on the chars protect themselves from current vulnerabilities as well as increase their resilience to likely future climate change-induced shocks.

With increased incomes, improved asset bases and diversified livelihoods, households will be better able, in the event of disaster, to afford coping strategies that do not tip them back into extreme poverty. Households are able to move away from a heavy reliance on agricultural wage labour, which is already seasonal and is likely to become less predictable in the future. With CLP support, households can derive a higher proportion of their income from land and agricultural produce (crops and livestock) and are therefore likely to be in a better position to weather shocks such as flood, erosion or family illness.

Equally important and inter-related aspects of a climate-resilient sustainable livelihood are WASH outcomes, women's empowerment and food security – all areas where CLP has seen impressive results.

With 85% of core households meeting six out of ten graduation criteria, the vast majority of CLP participants are therefore on the right trajectory out of extreme poverty and towards livelihoods that can cope with the vagaries of climate change.

² CLP 2 will support 78,000 CPHHs through six annual intakes or Cohorts between 2010 and 2014. Support to each Cohort lasts 18 months.

³ For methodological reasons, this is likely to be an under-estimate.

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USING RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT TO ACCESS KHAS LAND: EXPERIENCES OF THE LANDLESS IN NOAKHALI



USING RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT TO ACCESS KHAS LAND: EXPERIENCES OF THE LANDLESS IN NOAKHALI

Author: **Rezanur Rahman**, In-charge, Report Cell, Nijera Kori
Co-Authors: **Nusrat Ara, Rina Amena**, Members, Report Cell, Nijera Kori

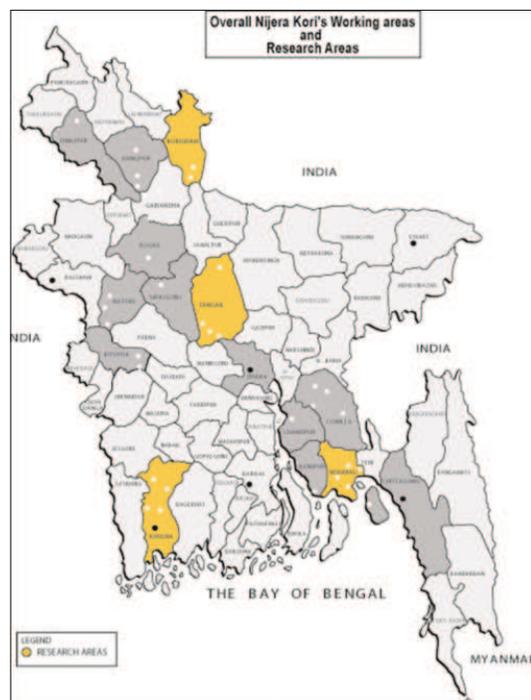
Abstract

The report mainly focuses on the rights of the landless to khas land. There have been discussions on land reform for decades but, in reality, land reform has seen very limited success in the country. A significant and progressive aspect of land reform is the distribution of khas land; however, due to the apathy and lack of initiative by the government, khas lands are being grabbed by land grabbers/jotedars. The number of landless people—who are dependent on the agricultural land for their lives and livelihoods—is increasing at an alarming rate. As a result, a large number of the landless are being forced to relocate to the cities in search of new modes of survival.

Under the circumstances, there is an urgent need for a fundamental change in Bangladesh's development policies and practices. The landless people of Shubornochor upazila in Noakhali believe that this change can begin with land reform and the proper distribution of *khas* land and water-bodies among the landless. Although this should have been a priority of the government a long time ago, the issue of land redistribution has never been seriously addressed.

Research Methodology

This report aims to portray the experiences of ordinary people in using the Right to Information (RTI) Act. It is on the basis of these experiences that public hearings were held, and collective demands were made to ensure the effectiveness of RTI at all levels and in all instances. This report does not use conventional research methods, but rather participatory research methods, whereby the landless themselves design and conduct their qualitative research work on their own terms. The report is based on the experiences of 30 landless people.



Findings

These experiences have been divided and analysed in three main parts. a) Citizen rights and state duties: Experiences of the landless of the Char on using the right to Information Act. b) Human Rights, Dignity and Security and c) Harassment and the negligence of duty.

The first set of experiences addresses how the issue of access to natural resources, e.g. *khas* land and water bodies, is integrally tied to structures of power. Whether or not people can obtain information on *khas* land through the RTI depends on the will of those in positions of power in the char lands. As such, there is a lot of apprehension among the interviewed landless women about the effectiveness of RTI; they believe that the more the powerful people can hide information or make the process of obtaining information complicated, the easier it becomes for land grabbers to continue their illegal hold over the *khas* land. That is why the laws that exist to protect the landless are hardly ever implemented. The elites in the villages exert tremendous control over the government administration, such that in many cases, the administration takes the side of the *jotedars*. As a result, the government is losing its own resources to the *jotedars*.

The landless men and women had thought that the RTI would play an important and positive role in their lives but, according to their experiences, they have not benefitted from this act in terms of their access to *khas* land. Even though they applied through the RTI, the government administration refused to provide the requested information citing different excuses. The landless members were harassed in many ways. The issues that were specifically highlighted through the interviewees were—the lack of respect of administrators regarding RTI; irresponsible and inefficient conduct of government officials; human rights violations; discourteous behaviour towards women; misuse of administrative power; different forms of threats from *jotedars*. They recounted their experiences of going to the government office time and again, leaving their work as day labourers, travelling great distances and being turned away, resulting in economic losses.

Based on their experiences, the landless women and men think that the conduct of the officials is not only contrary to the information act itself, but is also contrary to the constitution. The landless members' statements show that they are being denied right to *Khas* land, and they believe that their experiences should be shared with the public at large.

Research Description

Summary of facts about khas land

In Bangladesh,ⁱ *khas* land and water bodies constitute approximately 3.3 million acres in total (agricultural land 75% and water bodies 25%). Of the total agricultural *khas* land 43.47% has been distributed. According to government data, 39.35% *khas* land that can be distributed is being illegally occupied by powerful coteries. According to Dr. Abul Barkat, if this *khas* land which has been identified but not yet distributed were divided equally among Bangladesh's landless families, each family would get 0.37 acres of *khas* land

Land reform and its reality

The *khas* Land Distribution Policy 1987 explicitly states that "Land Reform" is a fundamental pledge made by the government. With this in view, since 1972 the government has been distributing *khas* land among the landless families.

The fifth clause in the *khas* land distribution policy states that the vast expanse of *khas* land scattered over the country will be recovered and will be distributed to actual landless people on the basis of priority.

Though the policy mentions the of lack of information about *khas* land and water bodies, the issue of *khas* land still remains neglected. Even to this day, there is no information as to how much *khas* land is available in the country, compounded by the fact that *khas* land is always in a state of formation and erosion, particularly in the char areas. *Khas* land and its distribution is an incomplete, unresolved and secret issue. The main reasons have been identified as land grabber groups-such as influential village leaders and corruption politicians, government officials, industrialists etc. These people are illegally occupying vast expanses of *khas* land.

Applications for Information

In this context of insufficient information and official concealment about land distribution, a group of 30 landless men and women took the initiative to file a Right to Information request concerning distribution of *khas* lands in their community. They are day labourers, rickshaw pullers and small businessmen between the ages of 23 and 65. Most of the applications were made to the Upazilla Assistant Commissioner (Land). However, as the information was not available, an appeal was made to the Deputy Commissioner, Noakhali. Their RTI request sought the following information: the list of names of landless peoples who would get the distributed *khas* land; the amount of *khas* land under shrimp cultivation; the amount of agricultural *khas* land allotted for shrimp cultivation; the amount of *khas* land for which registration has been given; the names of the members of the Upazilla *khas* land distribution committee; and the status of *khas* land that has not been distributed and the water bodies leased out in favour of the powerful land grabber groups etc.

Legal Basis for Information Access

The constitution is the basic basis of citizen rights and state responsibility and duties. Article 7(1) of the 1st part of constitution states that, "all powers in the Republic belong to the people"; article 11 of the 2nd part of constitution states that, "The Republic shall be a democracy in which fundamental human rights and freedoms and respect for the dignity and worth of the human person shall be guaranteed"; article 14 states, "It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to emancipate the toiling masses the peasants and workers..... from all forms and exploitation"; article 15 states, "It shall be a fundamental responsibility of the State to attain, through planned economic growth, a constant increase of productive forces and a steady improvement in the material and cultural standard of living of the people..... the provision of the basic necessities of life, including food, clothing, shelter, education and medical care"; article 15 also mentions, "The State shall adopt effective measures to bring about a radical transformation through the promotion of a agricultural revolution"; and article 10 states that, "Steps shall be taken to ensure participation of women in all spheres of national life".

To ensure all these constitutional rights for the citizens, necessary law and policies have been formulated. Within these law and policies "Right to Information Act, 2009" has been used for collecting information. For reviewing the information and other consequences in relation with the information collection; RTI Act 2009, National Women Development Policy; CEDAW convention and *khas* land distribution policy have been analysed. The summary of the findings has been presented on the basis of the constitutional rights and RTI Act 2009. The Domestic Violence (Prevention and Protection) Act, 2010 states clearly "Women means Women of all age".

Why the public audit on khas land and water bodies?

Agriculture represents the largest sector of Bangladesh's economy, and employs three quarters of its population. However, radical inequality in land distribution has resulted in a massive landless population that has doubled in the past three decades. While the constitutional guarantee of *khas* land distribution has promised to spread the gains of the country's agricultural development more widely, this has been largely unfulfilled. Lack of information about this distribution has prevented citizens from holding elected officials accountable for ensuring their rights. In this context, the Right to Information Act has been mobilized to conduct a Public Audit in order to increase transparency and promote *khas* land distribution among the landless.

Citizen rights and state duties: Experiences of char dwellers on using the right to information Act

The Right to Information Act of 2009 recognizes the right of citizens to access information of public interest from any public authorities (including government agencies and NGO officials). However, implementation and enforcement of the act has been exceptionally weak. The experiences of the 30 landless men and women discussed in this paper offer insight into the challenges faced by citizens seeking to exercise these rights.

To get an interview with the relevant government officials, these applicants travelled 10-20 kilometres to their upazila office. Upon arrival, they were confronted with a series of confrontational questions, such as "Who are you? Why have you come? What would you do with this information? Who has sent you? Why should I give you information?" When the applicants introduced themselves and explained their purpose, referring to the right to information law, the officials became agitated, rebuking and insulting them. The officials reproached the individuals, saying "Don't teach me laws", "get out from the office", "there are lots criminal living in the char. You are one of them" and "Do you know who I am?"

Testimony of Abdul Haque

Village-Charkalmi, Upazilla-Companiganj, Noakhali

In Companiganj Upazilla, the UNO acts as the Assistant Commissioner (land). After four days of chasing. I found him in his office. As soon as I gave him the application for information, he said, "Who are you? Where have you come from? What would you do with this information?" I said, my name is Abdul Haque, I am a member of a landless organisation. I come from Charkalmi.

Some Jotedars make claims to khas lands, often claiming to have been the previous owners of the land. In order to verify these claims, I made an RTI request. My application made the official very angry. He said, "who are you? Why should I give you information? I have a stack of work to attend to, I cannot give you information. Go away." At this I said, "please keep my application. If you cannot give the information, as per the Right to Information Act, you have to state your inability in writing." This made him more agitated, "Who are you to ask for a written reply? Charkalmi is full of thieves and rogues, you must be one of them. You bastard, leave this place immediately, or I'll have you arrested." At that point, Haji Idris, former chairman of Char Elahi Union Parishad was present. Haji Idris told the UNO "I know him, he is a leader of the landless organisation. If you do not want to give the information, please explain to him politely." Despite that, he threw me out of the office. Subsequently I submitted the same application to Deputy Commissioner. He provided partial information.

Human Rights, Dignity and Security

Women in char areas

Female landless group members who have submitted RTI requests have faced exceptional harassment and lack of cooperation from authorities. Four women applied to the Upazila Assistant Commissioner (Land) for information about *khas* land and water bodies in their area from the char areas. In response to their applications, some received partial information, and some received no information. Moreover, they faced harassment throughout the process of submitting their applications. The women reported being asked by the officials "why would an elderly woman need information?" To this, Arnika Dhali, one of the applicants, replied, "under the Right to Information Act, you are required to provide information." He became agitated before she could finish her statement and yelled, "You old woman, you have come to teach me the laws? I educated myself with my father's money to sit in this chair." He wrote down my Ansar VDP batch number and made threats that he would make sure my VDP service was cut off.

Another applicant, Amena Khatun, described her experience of being denied information and submitting an appeal. One night around midnight, she received a call on her cell phone asking "are you Amena? I am Haurun or Rashid from office of the UNO. Come and meet UNO sir tomorrow morning." The next morning when she entered the UNO's office she was asked, "are you Amena? What appeal have you made against me to DC sahib?" She said, "I wanted information regarding *khas* land, but I did not get any information. Hence, as per the Rights to Information Act, I made the appeal. I have not made any complaint." As soon as he heard this he was furious and yelled "shut up, you manner-less woman, I will slap you." He called his peon and ordered him to call the police. "Keep her under confinement." Then he confined her and continued to insult and harass her. In this situation, she said, "I was asked to come to your office, that is why I came. If you can give the information, then give it to me. If you can't, then don't. But don't behave abusively." At this he shouted "you beast, get out of the room."

Testimony of Amena Khatun

Village- Char Mohiuddin, Upazila-Subarnochar, Noakhali.

Despite making repeated enquiries, I could not find the name of the Information Officer who was responsible for processing RTI applications and providing information. So finally I went to the Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO) to submit my application. Initially he did not want to take it. Then he accepted it but refused to give me any information. So then I submitted an appeal to the Deputy Commissioner (DC). In the meantime on 6th July 2012, around 12a.m at night I got a mobile call from Upazilla Nirbahi Office's employee Harun. He asked me, "Are you Amena? Tomorrow morning please come and meet Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (UNO). It is important" Next morning he again rang up to go to Upazilla. On 7th July I went to Upazilla with Qari Bhai (Mostofa Qari). Both of us entered UNO's room. He asked, are you Amena? What appeal have you made to DC sahib against me? Do you know who am I? Which information do you want? Who asked you to take the information? I then said, for our own requirement I have asked for the information. We need this information. The government has made the Right to Information Act. to give information, and for this reason we have made the appeal. As soon as I said this, the UNO shouted "shut up, women, you

upstart. I will slap you” He called his peon and ordered, “call the police, close her for 24 hours” Than he really kept me in confinement. “From your office I was asked to come, that is why I have come. If you can give the information than you give it, if you cannot, do not give it. Why are you misbehaving? After I finished, he started abusing me. “You bastard, get out of the room”. Don’t hurl invectives—saying this we come out.

Harassment and Negligence of Duty

To submit their RTI applications, the applicants walked 10-12 kilometres of road to get to the Upazilla office and on average they each had to go four times. This was a significant hardship for these landless people, who cannot feed their families if they miss a day’s labour. However, they had to repeatedly visit the offices of the officials, who receive their salary even if they are absent from the office. On the other hand, the applicants complained that, though they visited the Upazila land office several times but they could not find any officials. For this, many of them applied directly to the UNO.

A major challenge to the implementation of the Right to Information Act is the failure of the government to appoint relevant Information Officers in the land offices. Among the land offices in the six Upazilas examined in this paper, officials have been appointed for only two (Companiganj and Raygonj), while the remaining four (Subarnochar, Kabirhat, Rowmari and Dumuria) do not have officials. In the absence of Information Officers in the relevant offices, it is impossible for citizens to exercise their right to information granted by the RTI Act.

Testimony of Belal Uddin

Village- East Shulaiyakia, Sadarupazilla, Noakhali

I am an elected representative from Dharmopur Union. A group of landless women and men came to me to get information about the distribution of khas land. For this reason, I applied for information from the Assistant Commissioner (Land) in Sadar upazilla in order to find out the area of khas land and water bodies in the locality. When I went to his office, the staff told me that he would be back in two hours. I waited for half of a day, but he never showed up. Two days later, I went again to submit the application. When I entered his room, he said, “who are you? Why have you come?” I said, I am an elected member of Dharmapur Union Parishad. I need information about khas land, so I have come to submit an information request.” He read the application and said, “why do you need this information? Who sent you? These are secret government matters. It is not possible to give information about these matters.” To this I responded “The Right to Information Act gives us the right to demand this information.” This made him more agitated, and he told me to leave or he would have me arrested. Then I said, “I am a member of the landless organisation. I have thousands of members with me.” When he heard this, he said, “I have not received any direction from my superiors. Had I been directed, I would have given the information.” What I don’t understand is, if even I, as an elected representative of my community, cannot get information when I request it, then how can any ordinary citizen get it?

Testimony of Ibrahim Mia

Village- Nobogram, Upazilla- Kabirhat, Noakhali

For two days I went to the office with my application for information. But it was in vain. The official was not available. After two days I found the UNO. He saw my application and said, "Why do you need this information? Who has influenced you to come here?" I said, "the shrimp cultivators are saying that the khas land which has been registered to the landless people has been allotted for shrimp cultivation. In order to find out whether this is true, I'm submitting this application for information." The UNO replied, "this information is classified. Hence, It is not possible to give you the information". I said, "The Right to Information Act gives me the right to access this information." The UNO become too angry and said that, with you, it is difficult to work in the office. Get out of my office, and as long as I am in this office, I don't want to see your face"

Char Areas, Past and Present: Issues to Consider

Due to erosion in the Meghna River, the district of Noakhali is in the process of disintegration. In the 1970s, new chars started surfacing. Starting during that time, landless people began to migrate to the chars to settle there. According to the weekly 2000 magazine, 20 crore taka worth of *khas* land has been occupied by industrialists in Noakhali. On the other hand, in the interview the Deputy Commissioner Noakhali said, "as there will be shrimp cultivation in those char areas, what is the need to resist them (Illegal Occupants)."

Regarding the *khas* land in Char areas, its ownership, and its benefits, if the policy makers and administration make such comments than it is time for us to ask questions—Should *khas* land and water bodies be for landless people or the industrialists? Why have the landless people been denied information regarding *khas* lands and water bodies? Why have the government officials refused to provide them this information? These questions are important not only for the landless people living on the chars, but for everyone concerned with the rights of the citizens of this country.

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LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS, ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND SOCIAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS IN THE CHARS OF BANGLADESH: GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES



LIVELIHOOD OPTIONS, ESSENTIAL SERVICES AND SOCIAL PROTECTION MECHANISMS IN THE CHARS OF BANGLADESH: GOVERNANCE ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Dr. Pranab Kumar Pandey, Professor, Department of Public Administration
Rajshahi University

Editorial Panel: **Shah Muntamin Mujtaba, Ashish Kumar Bakshi, Md Mozahidul Islam**
Oxfam in Bangladesh

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Chars are the sand bars that emerge as islands within the river channel or as land attached to the riverbanks as a result of the dynamics of erosion and accretion in the rivers of Bangladesh. They are also home to some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in the country. Approximately 7,200 square kilometers (5%) of the country is char land (EGIS, 2000) with an estimated population 6.5 million people, about 5% of the total population. These areas are particularly prone to the effects of frequent climatic shocks (floods, drought and cyclones) which increase the precariousness of char dwellers' lives by destroying their assets and pushing them deeper into poverty. In addition to the major physical hazards associated with the living on the chars, poor communication networks (Thompson, 2000) and isolation from the mainland means that these communities are greatly marginalized. Traditional development approaches are rarely successful in the chars as they remain excluded from mainstream advancements, including access to basic services. Unfortunately, these areas have not been the focus of development efforts of public or private agencies in Bangladesh¹; only in recent years has some research been undertaken to assess the vulnerability and livelihood of char communities (ITDG, 2002; DFID, 2002).

In light of this, the general objective of this research is to identify the gaps and challenges of governance in relation to char community livelihood and the problems associated with ensuring equitable access to natural resources, essential services and social protection interventions. A "cross-sectional qualitative study" approach has been applied. Primary data has been collected through community household surveys, KII, FGD and trajectory analysis from three UPs from the districts of Rangpur, Kurigram and Nilphamari in Northern Bangladesh.² The secondary data has been collected from reviews of available published documents; the study has come up with a different set of findings on the basis of the available information.

The first set of findings relates to livelihood options for people living on chars. It is evident that the selected chars are geographically isolated areas with low access to the transport network and ICT

¹ Although NGOs play a major role in delivering services for the poor in Bangladesh, even they do not have a major presence in the Char, which emphasizes the marginality of these areas. For a review of NGO development activities in Bangladesh see, P Thornton,., Devine, J., Houtzager, P.P., Wright, D. and Rozario, S., 2000, Partners In Development: A Review of Big NGOs in Bangladesh Commissioned By DFID, DFID Dhaka.

² A total of 75 community household (25 household surveyed from each Char), a total of 6 FGDs (1 male and 1 female from each Char), 15 KIIs at UP level 18 KIIs at Upazila level were conducted.

infrastructure in Bangladesh. The literacy here is 25.34 % compared to the national literacy rate of 51.3%. Tenancy (50.67%) and day labor (17.33%) have been found to be the main occupations in the selected Chars. It has also been revealed that 5.41% of the females (among total women) are dependent on selling daily labour to earn a living. Most of the respondents (62.67%) have expressed that they would like to change their occupation due to the fact that their present occupation does not provide them the guarantee of food security³ for all members of their family. One encouraging finding is that a good number of respondents have shown interest in being involved in income generating activities (IGA); however, very few (5.26% male and 5.41% female) have received IGA-related institutional training⁴. Another important finding is that, because of low employment opportunities, some of the inhabitants of Char Kharibari, Nilphamari often go to India as migrant workers despite the fact that doing so is risky and illegal from the perspective of inter-boarder laborer transfer. Two factors usually push them toward migrating to India in search of work: a lack of job opportunities and the low wage rate in Bangladesh; and the proximity of these Char areas to India, where agricultural labour is in high demand and wage rates are comparatively higher.

The second set of findings relates to the access to health and education services for people living on the chars. The findings suggest that people living on chars have a lower level of access to these basic services. One significant observation was that only 35.00% of the boys and 33.33% of the girls among the school-going children (aged 5-10 years) attended primary schools. Compared with national statistics, these figures are extremely low; in 2010, the national primary education rate was 86.4% for girls and 84.6% for boys. It was also found that most of the people living in Char areas took primary health care services from village doctors/quacks (93.33%) and nearby medicine shops (41.33%). However, one encouraging result was that 36.00% of the respondents availed health services from community clinics: an indication of the expansion of community clinics in Bangladesh. FGD findings revealed that most of the female respondents visited community clinics for healthcare. That being said, it was disappointing to note that the rate of institutional delivery was only 2.44%.

The third set of findings is related to knowledge and access to agriculture-related services and the social protection of people living in the Char areas. The available data suggests that very few males and females have functional knowledge on agriculture-related service delivery and its governing processes (DAE, DoF and DoL). One of the prime causes is that poor transport or communication networks prevent field-level officials of these departments from providing extension services to the Chars. It has been revealed that only 10.67% and 4.00% of farmers have received any service from DAE and DoL respectively within the last one year. It has also been found that 33.33% of the respondents have made contact with field-level officers and UP representatives for social safety nets (SSNs) as opposed to the 2.67% who have received any one of those services.

The fourth set of finding relates to access to assets and finance for the people living in Char areas. It suggests that the majority of the Char people are living on khas land without any knowledge of the process of applying for khas land leases. Only a few (8.00%) have been found to have applied for the leasing of khas land with the assistance of NGOs. It has also been seen that Char dwellers do not have sufficient knowledge of 'Jalmahol'⁵. Also, most of the respondents mentioned that they rely on informal

3 According to the respondents food security refers "to take meals twice in a day".

4 Training provided by GO and NGO organizations.

5 Government owned water bodies.

sources such as friends and relatives (50%) and the mahajon/money lord/dadan (30%) to meet their financial crises. Among the respondents, only 15% get access to micro-finance through NGOs. The conclusion to be drawn from this study is that the people living on the chars exist in vulnerable social and geographical circumstances. This sort of vulnerability has worrisome implications, usually pushing people to get involved in risky activities or to pass their days without proper food. Most of the families living in Char areas have often face monga or a food crisis throughout the year. More specifically, in the Bengali months of Vadra, Ashwin and Choitra respectively, only 25%, 17.33% and 12% of the households get three meals a day. This indicates that Char-dwellers are victims of severe food insecurity.

To combat these problems, both Government and NGO actors need to take a holistic approach to improving quality of life in the chars. The following recommendations could be taken into consideration:

- ❖ Community level mobilization is instrumental in increasing awareness about the negative effects of inter-boarder illegal migration.
- ❖ State and non-state actors can use different initiatives to increase the functional knowledge of Char people on basic services.
- ❖ Social mobilization and capacity development initiatives might be useful in increasing the participation of Char people in service-delivery related governing processes.
- ❖ Policy advocacy is important to draw the attention of policy makers to formulate a 'Char strategy,' with gender dynamics as the central point of discussion.

1. Introduction

1.1. Background

Chars are the sand bars that emerge as islands within river channels or as land attached to riverbanks as a result of the dynamics of erosion and accretion in the rivers of Bangladesh. These chars are also home to some of the poorest and most vulnerable people in Bangladesh. They are particularly prone to the effects of frequent climatic shocks (floods, drought and cyclones) which increase the precariousness of the poor char-dwellers' lives by destroying their assets and pushing them deeper into poverty.⁶

An estimated 6.5 million people, around 5% of the Bangladeshi population, live on the chars which make up 5% of the area of Bangladesh, a total of approximately 7,200 square kilometers (EGIS, 2000).⁷ In addition to the major physical risks associated with the rivers, char-dwellers in particular are

⁶ People in the Chars undergo several rounds of displacement due to climatic shocks throughout their lives. A study of people living along the banks of the Brahmaputra in NW Bangladesh indicated that 25% of families have migrated three times over the last ten years. See CARE Bangladesh and DFID-B., 2002, *The Findings of the Northwest Rural Livelihoods Baseline – 2002, Livelihood Monitoring Project, Dhaka, Bangladesh.*

⁷ Environment and GIS Support Project for Water Sector Planning (EGIS). Dhaka: University Press Limited, p.2. However, these are not fixed statistics. The environment of Chars is fickle and unpredictable. A large area gets flooded every year. In 1991, which is considered a high-average year, about 65% of the total land area was inundated in the upper reaches of the Brahmaputra-Jamuna. The 1998 floods inundated most of the area.

marginalized from the benefits of mainland Bangladeshi society because of isolation and poor communication (Thompson, 2000).⁸

The char dwellers depend mainly on agriculture and agriculture-related activities (i.e. fishing). Opportunities for off-farm activities are minimal. As a result of river erosion of the cultivable land, crops and homesteads are often damaged or destroyed. The level of awareness with respect to health, water & sanitation, the environment, rights and gender is very low; the livelihood strategies on the chars are usually mobile in order to cope with regular erosion and other effects of environmental variability.

Traditional development approaches are rarely successful on the chars, and these areas have not been prioritised for development efforts by the public or private agencies in Bangladesh.⁹ Only recently has some research been undertaken to assess the vulnerability and livelihood of char communities (ITDG, 2002; DFID, 2002 and Thornton, 2000).

The lack of basic services and governance representation, and the dependence on limited and seasonally variable resources, demands highly innovative and diversified livelihood strategies in the chars. However, this also leads to considerable social inequity. High food insecurity and low income results in the out-migration of at least one household member (usually the adult male) to find employment, leaving the women and children to subsist. As a result, there are many female-headed households in the chars and the poorer women are burdened with housework, crop cultivation and income generation (often food processing) demands (RDRS, 1999).¹⁰

With a view of reducing the vulnerabilities of people living in the char regions, different national and international organizations have been implementing various programmes in the northern part of Bangladesh. Like other organizations, Oxfam in Bangladesh has been implementing the Food Security Governance Project (FSTP) in three northern districts since January 2013 with the financial support of The European Union. The ultimate goal of the project is to strengthen the capacity for participation and influence of the poor and vulnerable farmers and fisherfolk in the decision-making processes related to food security. The project is supposed to build a strong alliance with the concomitant organizations and networks for amplifying the voices of the marginalized farmers and fisherfolk.

The Char Alliance is a new platform of national and international organizations working on the issues of char land. Oxfam, as one of the active members of this alliance, has taken the decision to participate in the National Char Convention in May 2015. Since a number of FSTP-conducting villages and unions are located in the char areas of Rangpur and Kurigram, Oxfam in Bangladesh has decided to conduct this study to initiate evidence-based advocacy for the people living in those areas.

⁸ Various studies have shown that the Jamuna bridge had a negative impact on the livelihood of the people living downstream of the river. See for example, Mojibur Rahman., 1999, *Impact of Jamuna Bridge on Livelihood Strategies of Char Dwellers of Jamuna River. Jamuna Char Development Programme*, p 3-7.

⁹ Although NGOs play a major role in delivering services to the poor in Bangladesh, even they do not have a major presence in the Char, which vividly indicates the marginalization of these areas. For a review of NGO development activities in Bangladesh see, P Thornton, Devine, J., Houtzager, P.P., Wright, D. and Rozario, S., 2000, *Partners In Development: A Review of Big NGOs In Bangladesh Commissioned By DFID, DFID Dhaka*.

¹⁰ The brunt of disaster impacts is very gender specific. Women suffer from both sides as they have to work hard to save families from floods; and when men leave for the cities looking for work afterwards, the women are left to fend for the families alone.

1.2. Objectives of the Study

This study has been commissioned by Oxfam in Bangladesh to assess the livelihood options, essential services and social protection mechanisms in Char regions, with a particular focus on the identification of the governance-related issues and challenges that the char-dwellers are facing. It seeks to attain the following specific objectives:

- ❖ To assess the scope for livelihood diversification, particularly for women in the northern char lands of Bangladesh.
- ❖ To identify and understand the governance challenges for livelihood diversification in the northern char lands of Bangladesh.
- ❖ To explore the extent of people's access to essential and social-protection related services.
- ❖ To understand the local power-structure in connection to local services, including those that create hindrances for the poor and marginalized occupants (farmers, fisher folks, service providers, other traditional occupations etc.), particularly the women.
- ❖ To draw specific recommendations to address the problems and challenges with regard to the study findings.

2. Conceptual Framework

The study team for this research has proposed a conceptual framework based on the 'sustainable livelihood framework'. In the socio-economic context of Bangladesh, the research has paid importance to exploring how governance-related factors affect the char people's access to human capital, natural resources, financial capital, physical capital and social capital. It is assumed that the success of livelihood-related interventions depends to a large extent on governance since that is considered to be the decision-making element of the program. In this research, livelihood diversification has been explored from the perspective of livelihood security. Chambers and Conway (1992) defined livelihood as a composition of capabilities, assets (stores, resources, claims, and access) and activities that are required for minting the quality life/lives. Livelihood becomes secure when it becomes capable of coping with and recovering from stress and shocks. Taking the "reality" of char life into consideration, the Chambers and Conway research (1992); existing occupations, choices and interests in select occupations; income-generating training and skills; available opportunities; access to livelihood-related assets/capital; innovations and adaptation of livelihood diversifications have all been drawn upon in this study.

In the context of this report, 'livelihood options' refers the poor char dwellers' access to and utilization of human, social, natural, financial and physical capacities. 'Essential services' refers to primary education, basic health service delivery, agriculture, fisheries, related government and non-government services and social safety nets. In exploring essential service-related governance issues, the policy options, local service delivery, power dynamics and inclusiveness in the service delivery process have all been considered. Social protection covers the government's social safety net services and protection-related services. Finally, this research looks at governance from a holistic perspective. This consists of policy options (i.e commitment in policies), implementation (service delivery) and inclusiveness (transparency, accountability and participation of poor people in the governing process).

The following issues have been considered as issues of analysis on the basis of the existing body of knowledge (i.e literature) and practical experiences of the team:

- **Poverty and Networking:** Most people living in Chars are poor. The poverty rate in Char areas is 80% (2007), compared to the national rate of 31.5% (2010) (Cited in Siddiki et.al 2014: 12). Since most of the Char dwellers are poor and migratory, they do not have helpful connections with the local government representatives and government and NGO service providers. Thus, they remain excluded from essential and other social services.
- **Recognition of Women as Farmers:** Due to the lack of diversified employment opportunities, most of the male workers migrate to different urban and semi-urban areas, leaving the women to undertake most of the agriculture-related activities. . Since women are not often recognized as “farmers”, service providers do not select them as beneficiaries of training and other livelihood support options.
- **Access to Natural Resources:** Access to and management of khas land, jalmahal (water bodies) and balu mahal (sand collection/market) is dominated by money, muscle and political connections. The poor char dwellers, including the women, often do not have access to these natural resources as they do not have control on the aforementioned factors.
- **Justice, Law and Order Situation:** Char areas are essentially geographically excluded. The poor physical and ICT-related infrastructure (access to mobile connections, radio, TV) means that people there receive lower levels of information about available opportunities, their rights and responsibilities. Moreover, service providers (GOs/NGOs) do not pay proper attention to these geographically excluded areas. Upazila and upper level officers/authorities usually do not monitor the process of service delivery of disadvantaged char regions. Instead, char dwellers often experience incidents like robbery and snatching of their cattle and crops.
- **Leadership, Transparency and Accountability Issues:** Char people have limited capacity to express their choices and voices in the governance and service delivery processes. Moreover, most local government representatives reside on the mainland. Also, Char dwellers often have their own motivations (to some extent agency-building) when it comes to taking part in the governing process. Sometimes they are called “chaira” (inhabitants of Char areas) and because of their identity, choose to exclude themselves from the governing process.
- **Innovation, Governance and Livelihood:** Social practices (community practices and indigenous knowledge), government institutions and GO-NGO collaborations have been trying to tackle disaster and livelihood-related challenges in Chars. Thus, a pertinent question is: do these initiatives bring changes in the governance of livelihood?

Relying on the conceptual framework, this research explores the above mentioned issues and goes further to address the above mentioned objectives.

3. Logical Framework

The following logical framework has been applied to this study:

Table-1 Logical Framework of the Study

Objectives	Indicators ¹	Methods	Sources of Information
To assess the scope for livelihood diversification, particularly for women in the northern Char lands of Bangladesh.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Existing occupations Choices and interest Training and skills Available opportunities Access to livelihood-related assets/capital Innovations and adaptation of livelihood diversifications. 	Document Review, household survey, Key Informant Interview (KII) and FGD.	Policy documents, Community People and local govt. representatives.
To understand/ identify the governance challenges for livelihood diversification in northern Char lands of Bangladesh.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy - level commitments to tackle livelihood related challenges Inclusiveness in service delivery (access to basic and SSN services, access to finance, capacity development training, access to natural resources) GO/NGO initiatives to diversify the livelihood options and state of social protection. 	Document Review, household survey, Key Informant Interview (KII) and FGD.	Policy documents, Community People and local govt. representatives.

¹¹ On the basis of the research questions mentioned in the TOR.

<p>To understand the local power-structures in connection to local services which create hindrances for the poor and marginalized occupants (farmers, fisherfolk, service providers, other traditional occupations etc.), particularly for women .</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Administrative and social networks • Service delivery actors and agency mapping • Criteria of service delivery • Official procedure and required documents • Patron -client relationship • Women’s movement and social capital. 	<p>Document Review, household survey, Key Informant Interview (KII) and FGD.</p>	<p>Policy documents, Community People and local govt. representatives.</p>
<p>To draw specific recommendations to address the problems and challenges with regard to study findings.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suggestions against the backdrop of existing governance challenges and recommendations to make the service delivery procedure pro - poor. 	<p>On the basis of the study findings</p>	<p>Policy documents, Community People and local govt. representatives.</p>

4. Methodology

A cross-sectional study has been conducted in three UPs of Rangpur, Kurigram and Nilphamari in Northern Bangladesh. Since the operating procedures for field administration of Bangladesh are similar in the three Upazilas, three UPs (mostly three Chars) were chosen randomly for data collection. Before the collection of primary data, national-level policy documents were collected and analyzed to understand the existing livelihood-related interventions, services, activities and implementing bodies and their respective roles and responsibilities. In order to clarify the differences between the interventions and the relevant existing policies/ laws, 7 types of respondents from Upazila level and 5 types of respondents from UP level were interviewed using pre-formulated semi-structured questionnaires. Details of the respondents are given in Table 2. Finally, two FGDs and community surveys were conducted at each UP (one from males and one from females) in order to gain insight into the real experiences of the service recipients.

Table-2: Types of Respondents

Level	Respondents
Upazila Level	Upazila Agriculture Officer (3), Upazila Fisheries Officer (3), Upazila Livestock Officer (3), Upazila Women Affairs Officers (3), Project Implementation Officer (PIO) (3) and Upazila chairman (3) = Total = 18
Union Parishad Level	Sub-Assistant Agriculture Officer (3), Social Welfare Field Worker (3), U P Chairman (3), Female UP member (3), Community Leader (3) (women from Char) = Total = 15
Community Level (Household Survey and FGDs)	25 Household survey from each 'Char' (total household survey 75) A total of 06 FGDs (1 Male and 1 Female from each Char)

5. Governance Issues and Livelihood Challenges: Findings from the Field

A number of governance-related issues and challenges have been identified from the study, which are discussed in the subsequent sections. However, it is important to first have a brief discussion of how the issue of Char has been addressed in public policies:

5.1 Char and Public Policy

Public policies guide the implementing agencies to initiate appropriate action. NGOs and CSOs carry their advocacy programmes in implementation of different policies and against the policy backdrops. A number of policies have been explored in relation to the importance of public policy in dealing with the issue of livelihood-related challenges in the chars. The review of literatures suggests that the Char-related issues have been addressed by the following policies:

Table-3: Char and Public Policy

Name of the Policy	Char Related Content (s)
National Land Use Policy 2011	Chars have been considered in the Section 4 of this policy as one of the useful categories of land in Bangladesh. Moreover Section 10 of the same policy notes that Char land (mostly costal Char) will be used for settlement of the poor people and agricultural production.
Sixth Five Year Plan (Fy2011 - Fy2015)	It has been recognized in different places of this document that poor people enjoy very little access to government land, including Char land, khas land, water bodies etc.

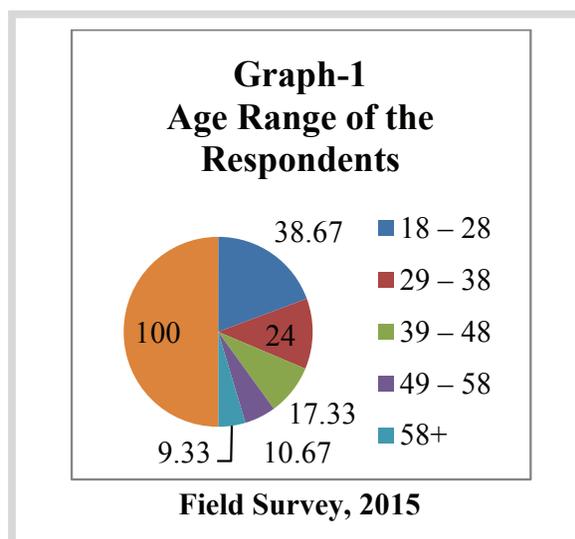
Name of the Policy	Char Related Content (s)
Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, 2009	In the section T4P5 - Action 3(A) of this document, it has been mentioned that some ministries (Ministry of Finance, Sectoral ministries, Ministries of Women and Children Affairs, Ministry of Social Welfare and Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs) shall remain responsible for assessing the impact of climate change on the vulnerable people, including char inhabitants (p.58).
Seventh Five Year Plan (7FYP) FY2016 -2020 [Focused Write -up, Ministry of Agriculture (Agriculture Sub -sector: Crops and Horticulture)]	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is the responsibility of the Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC) to determine targets to develop sustainable agricultural technology for Char land. • The Cotton Development Board (CDB) has expressed its desire to extend cotton production in to the high land of river banks and Char land.
National Plan for Disaster Management (2010 -2015)	Chars have been recognized as disaster-prone areas in this policy. However, no strategic direction has been given to manage the hazards of Char land.
National Health Policy, 2011	It has been noted in Objective -3 of the Bangladesh National Health Policy 2011 that a community clinic will be established for every 6000 people at the rural level. However, it is difficult to find the equivalent population on a single Char. Only the total population of five to six Chars can comprise that number. It is important to mention here that special provisions have been kept in Section -4 of the strategy part of the policy that enables the government to establish a community clinic for geographically disadvantaged areas, including Char areas.
National Agriculture Policy, 2013	It has been mentioned in Section 5.7 of the policy that Chars will be considered as an "unfavorable climate zone", and the government will take necessary steps to provide technological support to the farmers of Chars. Section 5.8 describes the importance of the protection of crops in during a disaster.

The discussion above reveals that problems of chars have been recognized by the policy documents in broader perspectives. Some sections of the following discussion will discuss the translation of these policies to the context of chars.

5.2. Socio-economic Background of the Selected Respondents

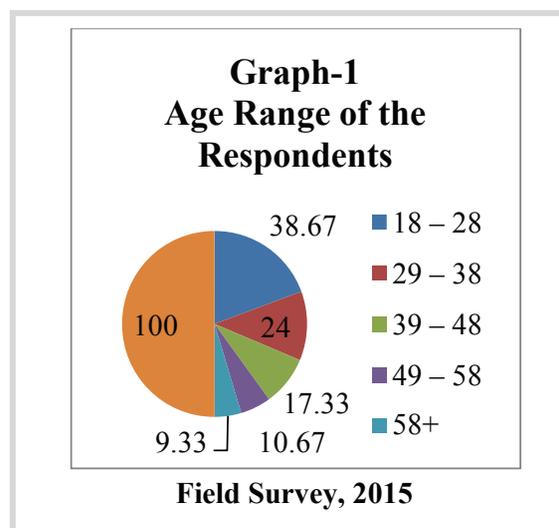
5.2.1: Gender Identity and Age

For this study, 37 random (49.67%) females and 38 (50.67%) random males were covered a for household survey. As stated earlier, this study attempted to ensure a gender balance while choosing the number of respondents. Regarding the age range of the respondents, it has been found that, among the selected respondents, 38.67% belong to the age group between 18 years and 28 years, while the percentage of older people (58+) is only 9.33%. The percentages for other respondent age groups are 24% (29-38), 17.33% (39-48) and 10.67% (49-58) (Graph-1). It is important to mention here that 80% of the respondents who were chosen for interview are below the age range of 49 years. This indicates that most of the people living in the Char land belong to the adult workforce.



5.2.2: Educational Qualifications

The issues of basic and vocational education have been explored in this research. Graph-2 suggests that an average of 74.66% (Male-78.95% and Female-70.27%) of the respondents were illiterate. Only 14.67% (Male 7.89% and Female- 21.62%) of the respondents were found to have completed primary (Class-1 to V) education. Only 10.67% (Male- 13.16% and Female- 8.11%) of the respondents were found to have completed secondary (Class VI-Class X) education while none of the respondents were found to have completed the SSC examinations. These results also indicate a couple of important aspects. First, the females in the char regions are relatively more educated than the males. This factor can be attributed to the government's initiatives to promote girls' education. Second, the literacy rate in the Chars (25.34%) is well below the national literacy rate (51.3%). This is because of the lack of expansion of educational opportunities in the Char areas.¹²



5.2.3: Family Members and Income

The data indicates the existence of diverse categories of families in the Char areas. For instance, 53.33% (40 out of 75) of the respondents had a family consisting of 1-4 members while 44% (33 out of 75) of the respondents had a family of 5-8 members. Only 2.67% (2 out of 75) respondents had families with more than 9 members. This is indicative of the fact that there are joint as well as nuclear families in the Char areas. Such results are representative of the overall family structure of Bangladesh.

Regarding the income levels of the respondents, available data suggests that only 30.67% (23 out of 75) of the respondents fell in to the BDT. 3100-4000 income bracket. On the other hand, 45.33% (34 out of 75) of the respondents confirmed that they earned around BDT. 2100 to 3000 per month (**Graph-3**). This data indicates that the level of earning of the Char people is very

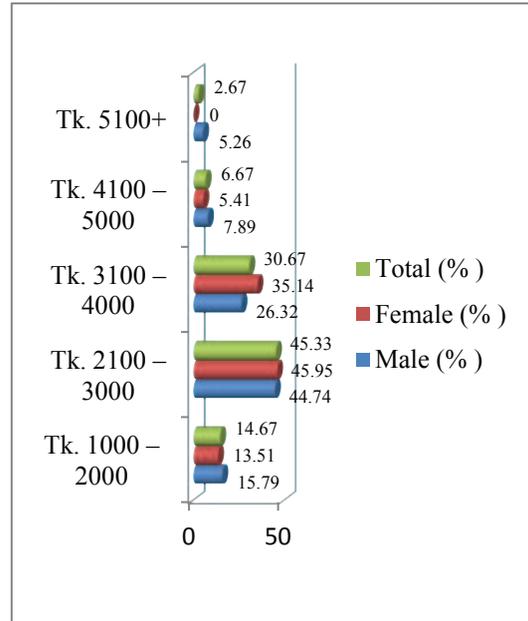
poor. One encouraging result is that females are also earning money in the Char areas. In some cases, the percentage of earning females is slightly higher than that of earning males. Considering the inflation rate of the country, however, it is very hard for them to maintain their livelihoods with such small amounts of money.

5.3 Options of Livelihood Diversity in the Selected Chars

Tenancy (50.67%) and day labour¹³ (17.33%) are the main occupations of people living in these Chars. The field survey also reveals that 5.41% of female respondents sold their daily labour to maintain their livelihood (Graph-4). The lack of employment opportunities has caused many inhabitants of Kisamot Char, Nilphamari to sometimes go to India as migrant workers despite the fact that this inter-broader transfer of labour is risky and illegal. One may wonder why these people continue to do so. A couple of possible answers to this question are: first, the lack of job opportunities and low rate of wage of labor in Bangladesh push

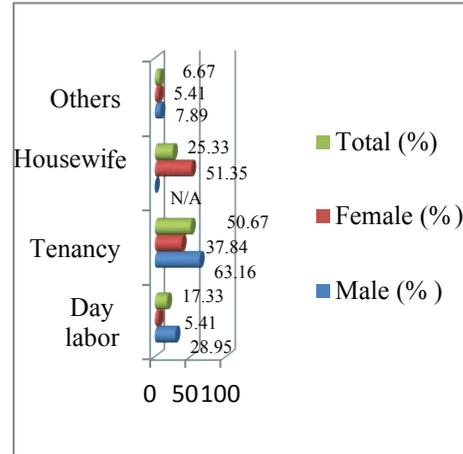
¹³ Agricultural laborer.

Graph-3: Income Levels of the Respondents



Field Data, 2015 (N=75)

Graph-4: Occupation of the Respondents



Field Data, 2015 (N=75)

Field Survey-2015 (N=75; M=38, F=37)

hem to go to India. Second their homes are adjacent to India and there is agricultural labor in demand across the border, with a wage rate comparatively higher than that of Bangladesh (FGD, 2015).

There is a noticeable difference between the livelihood options on “newly raised chars” and “old Chars”. For instance, Parbatipur Char in Kurigram is a newly raised Char (for more details see Annex: 1) where most of the family heads and young people go to other districts to sell their labour in the agriculture sector. This is because their chars are mostly sandy do not have arable land (FGD, 2015). Another factor affecting the livelihood of the Char dwellers in general and the women in particular is the fear of robbery and social insecurity at night. Kulsum Begum from Kurigram, who was interviewed as a community leader, mentioned that:

“Since most of the male members stay outside of their home as migrant workers, their wives pass fearful nights to save their ijrat (purity-related honor of women) and domestic resources. Two years ago robber snatched away the cattle of a house. The robbers threatened the woman of the family by saying that if she sought any legal help they would sexually assault her (KII with Community Leader, 2015)”.

Even though the livelihood options of Char areas are limited in comparison to the mainland, there have been some changes in recent years. A few years ago, for example, the main occupation of most of the people of Kismot Char, Nilphamari was to collect stones from the river and to sell agricultural labor in other districts. Now, many are working as tenants and are producing cash crops (FDG and KII with Community Leader, 2015).

The FGD (2015) findings also reveal that, despite their great interest in being involved with different types of economic activities, women fail to do when they have children under 5 years old. They believe that leaving the children home alone increase the chances of them falling into danger, which is indicative of the overall sense of insecurity that exists in our society.

Another important finding is the wage difference between the male and female workers in the Char areas. While conducting the FGD at Kismot Char, Nilphamari, it has been found that a male worker usually receives 200TK/day as wage during the harvesting period while a female worker gets 120 TK/day (FGD, 2015).

5.4: Interest in Changing Occupations and IGA Training

The study suggests that 62.67%¹⁴ of the respondents show an interest in changing their occupation since their present line of work does not provide food security¹⁵ for the entire family. While a large number of respondents expressed this interest in income generating activities (IGAs) they were unable to follow through due to a lack of training . Only 5.26% of the males and 5.41% of the females had received IG-related institutional training¹⁶. This indicates that very few organizations are implementing their training programmes in these areas.. Some NGOs like Polishree¹⁷ and JSK¹⁸ do provide limited support

14 Among them, female= 54.05% and male= 71.05.

15 According to them food security is “to take meals twice in a day”.

16 Training provided by GO and NGO organization

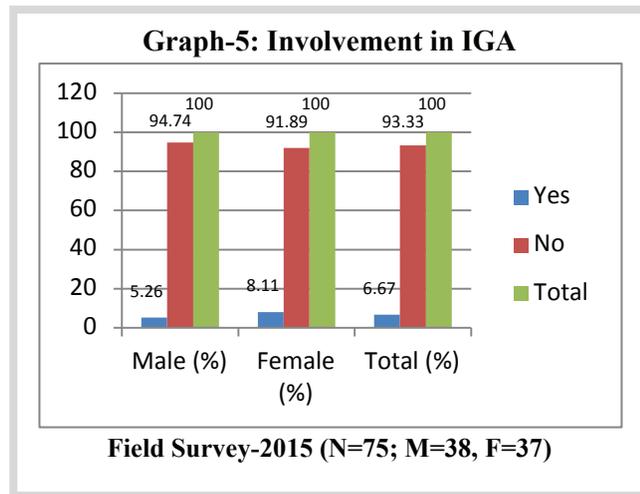
17 A Dinajpur district based NGO in Bangladesh

18 A Gaibandha district based NGO in Bangladesh

in developing technical capacity to the vulnerable households of Kismot Char, Nilphamari. Government support, however, is very limited; respondents from the selected Chars mentioned that they did not get any government IGA support, because they did not know how to acquire those services (FGD, 2015).

5.4.1 Involvement in Income Generating Activities (IGAs)

Usually, the move from traditional occupations to income generating activities provides the Char people with the assurance of higher incomes and livelihood security. According to the results, however, only 5.26% of the males and 8.11% of the females were involved in income generating activities (**Graph-5**). Even then, most of the IGAs were found to be informal and small-scale.



The study also reveals that Char dwellers usually do not get any IGA related support from the government service providers (DAE, DoL, DoF etc.). In Gopidanga Char, Rangpur, RDRS¹⁹ has provided 31 cows to the people along with the necessary training (FGD, 2015). Even though very few people are involved in IGA, their participation has brought changes to their livelihood. Mukta, a resident of Gopiganga Char, is a classic example of the changes in livelihood as a result of involvement in IGAs.

Mukta (28 years), who is a poor woman residing in Gopidanga Char, Rangpur, received cattle-rearing training from SEED (one of the local implementing partners of Oxfam in Bangladesh) in the last few years. She also received a calf from the NGO. She sold the calf after two years and used money to mortgage a piece of land and to buy two calves. She, along with her husband, has been producing different cash crops on that land for last three years. Now, her family is passing better days than in the past (FGD, 2015).

One of the IGA-related problems in the char areas is access to market. Social norms and the lack of proper communication systems prevent the women from gaining access to backward and forward linkages of entrepreneurship development. These factors compel them to sell their products at low prices. As an example, Rabiul Islam, the Chairman of Khagakhoribari UP, Nilphamari, mentioned that women of the char sold milk at 25 BDT/liter even though the market price of the milk is 30-35 BDT/liter (KII, 2015).

5.5. Livelihood Choices and Interest:

Some people living on the chars have been equipped with traditional skills and knowledge on specific kinds of employment. However, they fail to maximize the potential of their abilities due to the lack of backward and forward linkage-related support. Box 1 shows a list of the preferred occupations of the respondents:

Box-1: Preferred Occupations of Char Dwellers

- Cash crop production
- The Agriculture Technology Service (Power tiller, shallow machine for irrigation, harvesting)
- Poultry farm development
- Cattle rearing (Goat, cow, lam)
- Fishing and fish cultivation
- Small Enterprise/business
- Sewing /Tailoring
- Handicrafts (Bamboo, boutique, needle craft)
- Carpentry
- Handloom weaving
- Food/agro-processing

[Source: FGD, 2015]

5.6. Access to Basic Services

People's access to basic services has been explored in terms of access to education, health and agriculture related facilities:

5.6.1. Access to Basic Education

In order to understand access to education in the chars²⁰ the study attempted find out the percentage of families with school-going children. 80% families in the Char areas had one or two children aged between 3 to 10 years. However, of the 80%, only 35.00% of the boys and 33.33% of the girls aged between 5 and 10 years had been attending primary schools, implying that a large number of children on the chars do not attend school.

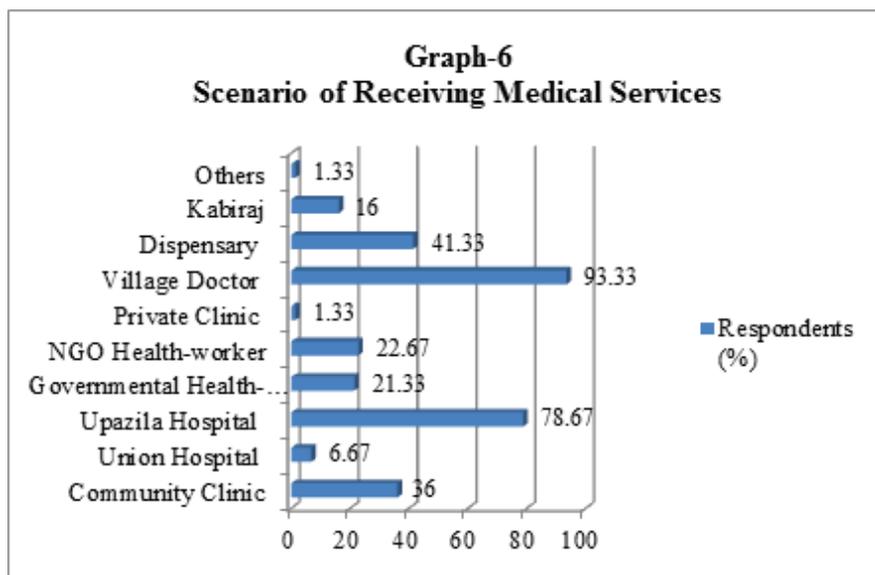
The reported obstacles to school attendance include a lack of road networks and water transport, the distance of school from home, the demand for child workers (especially as domestic workers) and the lack of community schools (FGD, 2015). There are no government schools on any of the chars surveyed; in one case, the community attempted to establish a primary school themselves but were unable to keep it running:

In the Parbatipur Char, Kurigram, the community established a primary school with the help a garment businessman based in Dhaka. The businessman and community people jointly started bearing the expenditure of the school, including the salary of the teachers. Suddenly, the businessman stopped providing his support in the second year. The local people tried to run the school with their own means, but failed. Now, the school is closed (FGD, 2015).

²⁰ In this research basic education refers to pre-primary and primary education

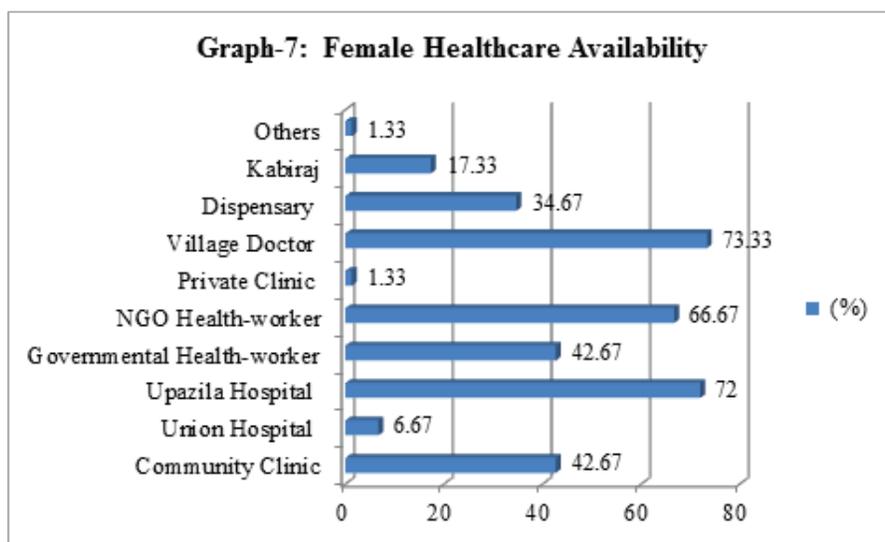
5.6.2. Access to Basic Health Services

The availability of healthcare is positively correlated to the physical and mental well-being of a population. Unfortunately, most of the char population remains excluded from basic healthcare services. They have a much lower level of access to basic provisions, with most seeking primary healthcare and treatment from the village doctor/quack (93.33%) followed by medicine shops at local markets (41.33%), Upazila hospitals (78.67%) and community clinics (36%) (Graph-6)²¹.



Field Survey-2015 (N=75)

A separate study assessed the situation of female healthcare availability. The data from that suggests that most female family members receive health services from the Upazila hospital (72%) followed by NGO health-workers (66.67%), community clinics (42.67%) and government health workers (42.67%) (Graph-7)²². It is important to mention here that women usually receive family planning and basic health guidance from NGO health-workers. For instance, according to the FGD findings of Char Gopidanga, Rangpur, a large number of females are getting health-related advice from the health-workers of RDRS (FGD, 2015). The overall findings in terms of health, therefore, do suggest positive trends.



Field Survey, 2015 (N.75)

²¹ Data used in this graph has been calculated on the basis of multiple responses of the respondents.

²² Data used in this graph has been calculated on the basis of multiple responses of the respondents.

5.6.2.1. Giving Birth and Place of Delivery:

Reducing maternal mortality is one of the important targets of the millennium development goals (MDGs). While it has been globally acknowledged that Bangladesh has achieved a marked improvement in the reduction of maternal mortality rates, the 7.32% institutional delivery rate on the chars illustrates that maternal health still has a long ways to go interns of equity.%. This is significantly lower than the national institutional delivery rate of 31.40% (GO hospitals/health care, NGO healthcare and private hospitals—Health and Morbidity Suvery 2012). Of the survey, 54.67% of the respondents experienced childbirth within the last five years. However, it is disappointing to state that 97.56% respondents had delivered their their children at home, compared to the national home delivery rate of 66.60% (Health and Morbidity Survery 2012). The improvements in maternal health, therefore, have not yet been expanded to include the chars.

If is important to mention here that the 3Ds (Decision, Distance and Diagnosis) play a critical role during the delivery of a child in Bangladesh.The following example represents the existence of these 3Ds during delivery in the Char areas:

Rina (23), wife of Mabej of Char Gopidanga, Rangpur, felt labor pains in the evening. Mabej and his family members decided not to take Rina to the hospital since hospital deliveries are costly. At midnight (around 3.00 a. m.), unskilled birth attendants informed the family that Rina was ina critical condition. Mabej and three relatives took Rina on their shoulders and carried her over the poorly maintained roads to the nearest bazar, 3km away from the Char. From there, they used a rickshaw van to go the Upazila (sub-district) hospital, reaching the health complex at 5:00am. Once there, the attending nurse reiterated that the condition of the mother was not good and advised that they take her to a private clinic in Rangpur city. There, they paid BDT 10000 for a caesarian section and medicine (FGD, 2015).

It was interesting to note that the family agreed to a private clinic in spite of the fact that Rangpur has medical colleges. Upon discussion with the family, it was revealed that poor people generally do not want to go to the government hospitals as they are not treated well by the hospital authorities. This indicates the poor health service delivery at government hospitals.

5.6.3. Agriculture Related Services

Very few males and females have functional knowledge on agriculture-related service delivery and its governing processes (DAE, DoF and DoL)²³. Annex-2 denotes that people have more knowledge about DAE-related services than of other service-providing agencies (DoF and DoL).

The issue of women’s involvement in agriculture has been studied using a qualitative approach as well. It has been found that when the male household head migrates from the char to semi-urban or urban areas. The women usually take on the agricultural responsibilities. However, their lack of recognition as “farmer”, service providers deprives them of training and livelihood support (FGD, 2015).

²³ DAE refers to Department of Agricultural Extension, DoF refers to Department of Fisheries and DoL refers to Department of Livestock.

5.6.3.1. Placing Demands for Services

Placing demands for services to the appropriate authorities is one of the prerequisites to availing them. However, the data reveals that only (10.67%) of the respondents made contact with DAE to place their demands while even fewer (4%) made contact with DoL. No respondent was found to have made contact with the DoF for their services.

5.6.3.2. Receiving Services

Of the respondents, 22.67% received services from DAE and 5.33% were helped by DoL. However, no one has received any services from DoF. *Now, a pertinent question is: why and in what context have more people have received services than they have asked for them?* Having placed this question to the respondents, it was learned they had received seeds from the DAE and vaccines for their animals during floods, though they had not asked for these.

On the issue of the availability of technical support from different governmental offices, few respondents receive technical support from the Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries Department. One Upazila Agriculture Officer stated, "We do not have any special program or project for the Chars. Usually, priority has been given on the development of agriculture of Char land in the Integrated Agricultural Development Project (IAPP). Although project has paid importance to the agricultural development of Chars, in reality, no activity of the project has been found in the selected Char" (KII, 2015).

In addition, the farmers who receive services from the field officers of DAE and DoL mainly go to get advice from their offices or the nearest bazaar where the field officers are usually located. Very few field-level service providers visit the Chars themselves, discouraged by the poor communication infrastructure. To quote one farmer in this regard, "*The Sub-assistant Agriculture Officer (SAAO) goes only as far his motor bike goes*" (FGD, 2015).

Another important finding is that service delivery at the grassroots level is dominated by the elites. The patron-client relationship usually excludes the those without power or connections, including the char dwellers. Commenting on the impact of the patron-client relationship, one of the SAAOs of Kurigram mentioned, "*In most cases the elites, including UP representatives and political leaders, put pressure on us to give the benefits to their relatives or nearest ones. Due to the administrative and political culture, we are compelled to provide the services to non-eligible people*"(KII, 2015).

Monitoring and evaluation play a significant role in tracing the achievements of policies programs or projects; however, the study found that most Upazila and field level officers have hardly any scope to monitor the service delivery process of government departments in the Char areas (including the reporting forms) (KII, 2015).

5.6.4. Access to Khas Land

The majority of the respondents interviewed in this study were landless. Thus, they are eligible for the ownership of khas land, which would be a significant asset for improving their quality of life. However, the findings show that, despite fulfilling the eligibility criteria for access to khas land, only 8% of respondents had submitted the required applications.

Among these applicants, almost all took the assistance of NGOs in making their application for khas land. Out of them, only successfully acquired access to the khas land; 3 people did not get access and the remaining two applications are still under consideration. The story of Laily Begum illustrates NGO support in the process of getting access to khas land:

Laily Begum (45), a landless woman of Kisamot Char, Nilphamari, did not have any knowledge of khas land and the process of getting access to it. However, with assistance from a field worker of Shouhardo II, she managed to apply for a piece of khas land. Her application is now under consideration (FGD, 2015).

5.6.5. Access to Credit

Credit is considered to be asset because it can be used for productive purposes and income generation; In Bangladesh, access to credit is considered to be a right. NGOs, specifically micro-finance institutions (MFIs), have become popular through their provision of micro-credit, small, collateral-free loans that the poor can use. Part of researching livelihood development in the chars was, therefore, an evaluation of the status and sources of credit for char communities.

5.6.5.1. Sources of Credit

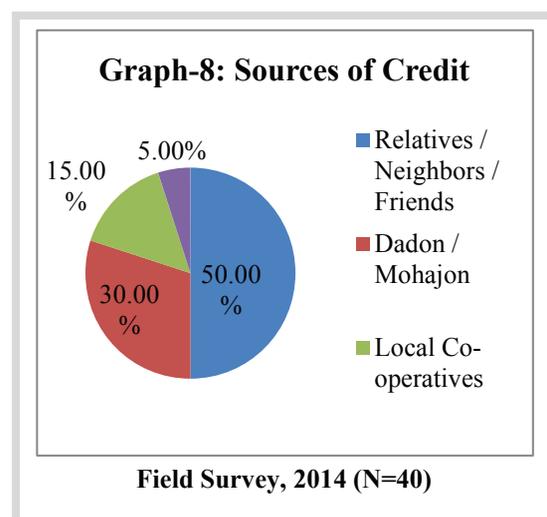
The poor financial condition of char communities was reflected in most respondents' claimed that they lived hand-to-mouth, and needed to take loans from different sources. The data depicted that around 53.33% (40 out of 75) of the respondents had loans from various sources.

Among the respondents (40 out of 74) who had credit, most of them relied on informal sources such as friends and relatives (50%) and the mahajon/money lord/dadan (30%) to meet financial crises. Two other sources were local cooperatives (15%) and NGOs (5%) (See Graph-08).

The amount of credit, nature of re-payments and conditions (i.e interest) vary depending on the sources of credit. The interest rates of local co-operatives and *dadon*²⁴ for instance, are higher than that of NGOs. For the people of the Kisamot Char who use *dadon* to meet their immediate financial crises, the yearly interest rate amounts to 120% (FGD, 2015); a one-month loan of BDT 1000 needs to be returned, with interest, at BDT 1100. NGOs also charge interest rates higher than those of formal banks and government institutions. Thus, it can be inferred that people living in Char areas need to pay higher rates for credit since they do not have access to formal sources.

5.7. Access to Social Safety Nets

Though SSN services are counted as policy instruments to protect the poor people from man-made and



²⁴ *Dadon* is a Bengali term that denotes one type of loan that is taken by a person from local business elites with high interest rate.

natural shocks, the benefit distribution system is not pro-poor. Rather, the target groups are the ones largely deprived of these benefits. The first issue addressed in this regard was whether or not char dwellers had made contact with anyone for access to social safety net-related services. Of the respondents, 26.32% (10 out of 38) males and 40.54% (15 out of 37) females had made contact with the local authorities or elected representatives to access one of the SSNs. These surveys also showed that SSN service delivery was dominated by local patron-client relationships. FGD data reveals that char people closest to the UP chairman and members are favored during the distribution of the benefits, according to the local sources (FGD, 2015).

The socio-economic conditions of most of the families reviews make them eligible for SSNs. However, the field survey findings showed that only 5.26% (2 out of 38)²⁵ males received one of the SSNs while none of the females received any. The availability of SSNs differs among localities as well: , in Kisamot Char, Nilphamari, the respondents mentioned that some people do get access to SSNs, while respondents from Parbatipur Char, Kurigram, noted that people of their Char hardly receive SSN services. Monetary involvement plays a significant role in determining the beneficiaries of SSNs, as the following example portrays:

Zoniati Begum (65)²⁶ requested her elected UP member to enlist her name for old age allowances. The member asked for BDT 1000 from her as an administrative cost to arrange a card for her. She eventually did not receive the SSN benefit as she failed to give him the money (FGD, 2015).

Most of the Upazila level officials acknowledge the importance of extended SSN coverage for the Chars as they are the worst affected by natural disasters and climate change. In this regard, one Upazila Social Service Officer suggested that additional attention be given to the Chars after disasters in order to enable them to cope with repairs and rehabilitation(KII, 2015).

5.8. Participation in Social Organizations and Local Government Institutes (LGIs) :

To reveal the nature of inclusion and exclusion in the existing power structures of the Chars, an attempt was made to investigate the respondents' involvement in social and local government institutions. The data indicates that this level of participation is very low. Only 44.74% males and 21.62% females have expressed their agreement to participate in social organizations²⁷ and LGIs²⁸. One important dimension is that the participation of females is lower than the males, which matches the general lack of women's participation at different levels in Bangladesh.

One of the discouraging findings of this study was that, irrespective of gender, respondents in this study had *no knowledge* of different provisions of the UP, including the ward shava, open budget meeting, standing committees, social accountability and local level planning. It was also found that local elected representatives and field-level government did not usually invite people from the chars to participate in the governing activities and planning because of remoteness and poor communication (FGD, 2015).

²⁵ The ratio is 2.67 when it is calculated among 75.

²⁶ The research team took her consent to use her name in the report

²⁷ Religious organizations, local clubs , co-operatives , farmers schools , any kind of formal community based organization

²⁸ Union Parishad

5.9. Social Mobility

The mobility of an individual is an important indicator of empowerment; it is generally perceived that mobility of women in Bangladeshi society is restricted. The social mobility of females was explored in the Char areas too, using the the local market and salish as indicators of mobility from farmland. The research revealed that a large percentage of women (51.35%) was involved in farm-based labor selling. Females also had limited mobility to salish (27.03%) and the local market (29.73%). These findings are positive in terms of women empowerment and involvement— however, a major reason could be that the women living on the chars are compelled to leave home due to poverty and related issues such as the need to maintain a livelihood.

5.10. Climate Change:

Living in a country at high risk of the impact of climate change, much of the population of Bangladesh is vulnerable. Those most at risk are the groups that depend on nature for their livelihood, such as the farmers and fisherfolk. In order to survive, they need to possess sound knowledge of climate change and the related processes of adaptation and mitigation.

5.10.1. Knowledge on Climate Change:

Respondents from the appeared to possess little knowledge on the issue of climate change; however, 96.00% percent of the respondents did have some perception of the fact that Bangladesh is facing climate challenges.²⁹ This is very encouraging in the context of people living on the chars. A pertinent question to ask would be how they gained this awareness. One possible answer is through the intervention of different NGOs that are involved in improvement of char livelihood.

5.10.2. Challenges of Climate Change:

Most of the farmers and fisherfolk of Bangladesh are already encountering climate change problems, more so in the northern regions of Bangladesh. According to the study, the damage of crops, infection of unknown diseases affecting humans, animals and crops, the reduction of fish from natural sources, drought, and river erosion have been identified as the main manifestations of climate change (Table-2).

Table-4
Challenges of Climate Change³⁰

Challenges	Response (Yes) (N= 75)
Crop damage	100.00%
Death of domestic animal	81.94%
Reduce production	79.17%
Unknown diseases of man, animal and crops	91.67%

²⁹ Among them, 100% males and 91.89% females.

³⁰ The calculation has been done based on the multiple responses of the respondents.

Challenges	Response (Yes) (N= 75)
Reduce income	94.44%
Loss of property or asset	36.11%
Price hike	62.50%
Unpredictable rain, drought and cold wave	41.67%
Declining fish from natural sources	93.06%
Destroy transport system	61.11%
Hamper agro - crops marketing	70.83%
Heavy rainfall	15.28%
Drought	100.00%
River erosion	100.00%
Lack of employment in agriculture	95.83%
Migration for work	91.67%

Field Survey, 2015 (N=75)

5.10.3. Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Management Processes

As a means of adapting to climate change, people of the study areas have started raising their homesteads, (98.61%), taking shelter in the secure places (83.33%) during emergencies, and sending family members, including children, to work away from home (76.39%). The other dominant adaptation measures are the cultivation of alternative crops (as tenants) (40.28%), changing occupations (45.39) and the selling of crops and labor in advance (45.38%).

**Table-5
Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Management Process**

Adaptation Strategy	Response (Yes)
By cultivating alternative crops	40.28%
By saving and collecting foods	8.33%
Raising homestead land	98.61%
Taking shelter in secure places	83.33%
Advance crops or labor selling	37.50%
Changing occupation	45.83%
Migration for work	76.39%

5.11. Food Security: the Number of Meals in a Day

Food security in the chars was assessed according to the of numbers of meals for a family per day. One of the drawbacks of the study was that that it did not consider the food security situation of the selected families in relation to balanced nutrition. Our field survey reveals that most of the families face monga³¹

³¹ Seasonal food insecurity in the northern part of Bangladesh

or food crisis throughout the year. In the Bengali months of Vadra, Ashwin and Choitra, only 25.00 %, 17.33% and 12.00% of households respectively take three meals a day (for more details see Annex-4). The following table illustrates the food crisis of the Char dwellers:

Table-6
Food Insecurity per Month

	Level of Food Insecurity	Description
Boishakh		Lower to moderate level of food crisis
Jaistha		
Ashar		
Shrabon		
Vadra		Near to severe food crisis
Ashwin		Relatively higher than average food crisis
Kartik		higher than average food crisis
Agrahayan		Lower to moderate level food crisis
Poush		
Magh		
Falgun		
Choitra		Severe food crisis

5.12. Strategies to Face Monga or Food Crisis:

Northern Bangladesh is known as a poverty pocket where a large number of people face the seasonal food crisis that they refer to as the “dreadful Kartik³²”. This is one of the many struggles that char dwellers face in meeting their basic needs in contrast to the people living on the mainland. The following table illustrates the different strategies that are being applied by the Char people to face the challenges of Monga or food crisis: taking less food (100%), selling domestic animals (96%), borrowing money or food (90.67%) and involving themselves (89.33%) in hard work outside the Char are some of the more common measures.

Table-7
Strategies to Face Monga or Food Crisis

Adaptation Strategy	Response (Yes)
Taking Loan or Food	90.67%
Doing More Work	89.33%
Going Outside for Work	42.67%
Using Savings	6.67%
Taking Help from Others	36.00%
Assistance from Governmental / Non-governmental organizations	5.33%

³² Considering the intensity and extensity of seasonal hunger, some Bengali months have been mentioned as dreadful

Adaptation Strategy	Response (Yes)
Eating Less Food	100.00%
Eating Cheap Food	60.00%
Selling Productive Assets	6.67%
Selling Domestic Animals	96.00%
Selling Crop / Labour in Advance	44.00%
Others	0.00%

Survey, 2015; N=75

6. Trajectory Analysis

In addition to collecting quantitative and qualitative data, the study has also drawn trajectories to support and analyse this information. Goleza's Begum's trajectory, presented below, covers the most critical issues of Char land:

The Case of Goleza Begum: The Story of An Uncertain Homestead

Most. Goleza Begum (63) lives on a char named Kisamat, situated in the Khogakhori Union Parishad of Dimla Upazila, Nilphamari. She was born in a village in 1942 when the country was a part of India. This village, which was situated on the bank of Teesta River, is now divided by the border between India and Bangladesh.

Although her family lived on the Indian part of Kisamat Char, they came to Bangladesh in 1947 when she was around five years old. Since then, she has lived here since then. Over the years, she saw numerous crops being cultivated such as paddy, potato and sugarcane; she also found various types of plants and bamboo fields flourishing across the chars. She enrolled in school, completed her primary education and married in 1959 at the age of twelve. She and her husband's family lived on the main-land until 1967, when they suffered from river bank erosion. Their village and much of its cultivable lands disappeared into the waters of the Tista. Some of their neighbors relocated. However, since they had not lost their house, Goleza's family stayed by the side of the river. Ten years later, (in 1977) they faced another river bank erosion and flood; this time, they lost their own homestead and cultivable lands. With no alternatives, they moved to another piece of land owned by their relatives.

In 1979, a new Char was raised. Goleza's family started living there along with a number of families who had lost their houses and lands. Unfortunately, in 1982, Goleza's house was destroyed by flood. They moved to higher ground, living by the road side.

Again in 1985, they experienced further river bank erosion that made the road a part of the river. They moved to their present Char with more than 100 families. In 1988, the devastating floods and even more erosion caused even more families to lose their houses and cultivable lands.

After the floods, Goleza herself experienced a great shock by the loss of her daughter, Amena, who died in 1991 from a serious fever. Since her family did not have adequate finances to visit the district hospital, her daughter died without access to medical services. In 1992, she experienced a serious crisis of work and food. Her husband and sons went to another district to earn money, but that was not enough to maintain their family.

One of her sons, Moin Uddin, married in the middle of 1994. They received some land as dowry from the daughter-in-law's family. In 2009, they moved to a part of this land and have been living here since then. Her husband is currently involved in a small business and her sons earn money by serving as migrant workers to different districts. However, even now, Goleza and her family live in great uncertainty of their home, much like the other Char dwellers.

The trajectory of Goleza's life demonstrates the following issues relating to livelihood on the chars:

- Flood and river bank erosion make people homeless and landless;
- Char dwellers have to build their homes several times in several places;
- Dowry is a common problem in Char areas;
- Inter-country political tensions bring the social and economic crises to char communities;
- Char dwellers often lose loved ones as a result of inaccessible medical treatment.

7. Discussions and Conclusion

The conditions of char communities are extremely poor, with many struggling to survive without basic necessities. While the national poverty rate is 31.5% (2010), the poverty rate in Chars is 80% (2007) (Cited in, Siddiki et.al 2014: 12): almost all of the households approached in this study were below the poverty line. In addition to being impoverished, most of the Char dwellers have migrated to the Chars from different places, all of which prevents them from establishing useful connections with local government representatives and GO/NGO service providers. As a result, they remain excluded from essential and other social services.

Despite the various challenges to employment and livelihood, some IGAs have drawn the attention of the local people. It is commonly perceived that very few IGAs have become successful in the Char areas; however, the success stories exceed those expectations.

Access to SSNs and khas land, unfortunately, are dominated by money, muscle, political connections and patron-client relationships. The landless poor of the chars, including the women, do not get access to these resources because of their deprivation and lack of control over the determining factors.

In addition to local socio-economic problems, char areas face geographical exclusion. Poor physical infrastructure and the lack of ICT-related facilities (access to mobile connection, radio, TV) mean that people have lower levels of information about their opportunities, rights and responsibilities. Service providers (GO/NGOs) do not pay proper attention to these isolated areas and uazila and upper level

officers/authorities do not monitor the process of service delivery here. Instead, char-dwellers often face threats to their existing resources, such as robberies and the snatching of their cattle and crops.

All of this is exacerbated by the fact that the Char communities have few means to express their choices in the governance and service delivery processes. Moreover, most of the local government representatives are physically distanced from them by the mainland. Sometimes, Char dwellers have their own motivations (agency-building, to some degree) to take part in governance. Identified and discriminated against as “chaira” (inhabitants of Char areas) they become further excluded as a group.

The following section outlines the recommendations made to ensure an improved quality of life for the char communities.

8. Recommendations

1. Most ministries and departments have reconsidered chars as areas of ecological and climatic value; however, more specific attention is needed to address the deep-rooted problems of char life. Forming a Char Development Cell/ Bureau (like Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board) will help collect information about the chars, provide policies and monitor the progress of development activities.
2. Char dwellers do not know about the income generating and capacity development support available from the government and private organizations. Government and NGO initiatives should aim to increase regional awareness in this regard.
3. The char dwellers are not involved in the governing process of service delivery and char community planning; social discrimination (being called “chaira”), a lack of confidence and limited initiatives from field-level and central officials keep them excluded. Social mobilization and capacity development strategies are crucial in increasing the participation of might be the appropriate process to increase their participation in community decision-making.
4. Government and NGOs can promote CSRs or social businesses to reduce the vulnerability of geographically excluded people.
5. Community-level mobilization is needed to increase awareness about illegal inter-border migration.
6. State and non-state actors can increase the functional knowledge of Char people on equal rights (including wage discrimination).
7. Policy advocacy is important part of drawing the attention of policy makers to formulate a ‘Char strategy,’ with gender dynamics as the central point of discussion.
8. It is important for GO-NGO agencies to pay special attention to geographically excluded areas like Chars, and to monitor and evaluate their activities. (For instance, Chars can be considered as an indicator in the evaluation forms)
9. In the Char areas, GO-NGO initiatives are essential in helping the community to run local daycares and early childhood development centers. These can assist families by giving young children a safe place to stay while the mothers are away from home earning wages.

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Annex-1
Socio-economic Context of the Selected Chars

Indicator/s	KisamoChar, Khogakhoribari UP, Dimla Upazila, Nilphamari	Char Gopidanga, Balapara UP, Kaunia Upazila, Rangpur	Char Parbotipur, Jatrapur UP, Kurigram Sador, Kurigram
Length of Settlement	People have been living into the Char for the last 5 decades	People have been living on the Char for the last 6 decades	People have started living in the Char in the last 4 years.
Number of Households	There are 156 households on this Char and approximately, 750 people live here.	There are 163 households on this Char and approximately 810 people live here.	There are 165 households on this Char and approximately 900 people live here.
Number of primary schools and distance from the Char	There is no primary school on this Char. The nearest government primary school is 3 km far from the Char. Community people started to establish a non-government primary school, but failed due to lack of teachers and financial crisis. Most children walk to school.	There is no primary school in this Char. The nearest government primary school is Araj Horishor Government Primary School, 2 km away from the Char. Children walk to school.	Although there is a primary school called 'Parbotipur Government Primary School' in this Char, most of the teachers do not attend the schools regularly. While conducting FGD, it was found that one of the teachers came to the school after 15 days. Most children walk to school.
Nearest Hat or Bazaar and, distance from the Char	The nearest rural market is 3 km far from the Char. In the dry season. Char dwellers go to market on foot and in the rainy season they use boat.	The nearest rural market is 6 km far from the Char. Half of the way to the market, they go on foot and for the rest they use rickshaws or vans.	The nearest rural market is 3 km away from the Char. To go to half of the way to the market, they rely on the local boat and for the rest they use auto-rickshaws or vans.
Nearest Community Clinic, Union Health Complex and Upazila Health Complex	There is a community clinic situated 3 km away from the Char. The union health complex is 7 km away from it. The Upazila Health Complex is 14 km away.	There is a community clinic situated 4 km away from the Char. The union health complex is 5 km away from it. The Upazila health complex is 7 km away.	There is a community clinic situated 5 km away from the Char. The union health complex is 6 km away from it. The Upazila health complex is 22 km away.

Indicator/s	Kisamot Char, Khogakhoribari UP, Dimla Upazila, Nilphamari	Char Gopidanga, Balapara UP, Kaunia Upazila, Rangpur	Char Parbotipur, Jatrapur UP, Kurigram Sador, Kurigram
Description of NGO facilities /Activities	Pollisree, a Dinajpur -based NGO is implementing the disaster management related REE -CALL project. BRIF, a Nilphamar-based local NGO, is providing support in livestock related development. POPI, a national level NGO, has been working here for the last few years under Char Livelihood Development Program (CLP). JSKS is working as a Shouhardo -2 partner.	SEED, a Rangpur -based NGO, is implementing the disaster management related REE -CALL project. RDRS, a regional level NGO, has been working for last few years under the Char Livelihood Development Program (CLP).	Zibika, a Kurigram based local NGO, has been working for last few years under Char Livelihood Development Program (CLP).
Agriculture Diversification and other income Generation Activities	This area has shifted from tobacco cultivation to maize. Some women are involved in cattle rearing.	Tobacco and sugar cane cultivation were the dominant agricultural products of the Char. Now, these are chili, jute, potato and nut. Some females are involved in hat -sewing (tupi-selai)	Daly labor selling, cutting and selling hemp at Jatrapur bazar were the main occupations on the Char. Now, they are cultivating nuts, chili and vegetables. Some females are involved in cattle rearing.

[Source: Field Survey, February, 2015]

Annex-2

Awareness of the Service Recipients on Service Delivery of DAE, DoL and DoF³³

Indicator (s)	Department (s)	Level of Awareness of the Service Recipients
Demonstration	Agriculture Extension	17 (22.67)
	Livestock Department	0 (0.00)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Technical Support	Agriculture Extension	1 (1.33)
	Livestock Department	0 (0.00)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Equipment	Agriculture Extension	27 (36.00)
	Livestock Department	29 (38.67)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Training	Agriculture Extension	7 (9.33)
	Livestock Department	1 (1.33)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Seed / Fish Finger	Agriculture Extension	52 (69.33)
	Livestock Department	0 (0.00)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Loan	Agriculture Extension	0 (0.00)
	Livestock Department	0 (0.00)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Subsidy	Agriculture Extension	10 (13.33)
	Livestock Department	0 (0.00)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Grant	Agriculture Extension	0 (0.00)
	Livestock Department	0 (0.00)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Group Formation	Agriculture Extension	1 (1.33)
	Livestock Department	0 (0.00)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)
Others	Agriculture Extension	3 (4.00)
	Livestock Department	0 (0.00)
	Fisheries Department	0 (0.00)

Field Survey, 2015 (N. 75)

³³ Based on multiple responses.

Annex-3

Meals per Day in Different Months³⁴

Month (Bengali)	Response		
	One Time	Two Times	Three Times
Boishakh	6.67%	30.67%	62.67%
Jaistha	4.00%	26.67%	69.33%
Ashar	21.33%	28.00%	50.67%
Shrabon	21.33%	26.67%	52.00%
Vadra	9.33%	65.33%	25.33%
Ashwin	9.33%	73.33%	17.33%
Kartik	13.33%	56.00%	30.67%
Agrahayan	5.33%	20.00%	74.67%
Poush	0.00%	20.00%	80.00%
Magh	0.00%	17.33%	82.67%
Falgun	6.67%	41.33%	52.00%
Choitra	29.33%	58.67%	12.00%

Field Survey, 2015 (N. 75)

³⁴ Based on multiple responses.

A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE APPROACHES OF CLP AND SIPP



A COMPARATIVE STUDY BETWEEN THE APPROACHES OF CLP AND SIPP

M. Anisul Islam, Director; Firoj Ahmed, Md. Ehsanul Eoque, Touhidul Islam, Senior Programme Officer, Avijit Paul, Research and Monitoring Officer
Manab Mitra, Chakma, Project Officer, CNRS

Abstract

The Char Livelihood Programme (CLP) and Social Investment Programme Project (SIPP) are among the biggest poverty alleviating programmes in Bangladesh. CLP working in Char islands situated in North West region of Bangladesh, on the other hand, SIPP working area covers 6 divisions including Char area. CLP is jointly funded by UKaid through the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Australian Government (AusAID). Likewise, SIPP is a government-led initiative supported by the World Bank. CLP predominantly focuses on transferring asset with the aim alleviating poverty. CLP aims to benefit the poorest of the poor living in Char areas through interventions like healthcare and market development. However, the programme has broad interventions on improving social and economic asset, reducing environmental and economic risk, increase access to markets and services. SIPP main approach is based on formation and fortification of community based institutions, empowering women and youth to build accountable, inclusive and transparent village institutions to fight poverty. Nevertheless, it concentrates on certain thematic activities such as capacity building, community finance, livelihood development, youth and employment, environment, climate change and risk reduction. Both CLP and SIPP are linked with livelihood and beneficiaries are poorest of the poor. The first one focuses on asset transfer and later one concentrates on institution building. The approaches of this study would compare similarities and uniqueness between two projects. The paper will derive with experiences of the beneficiaries and personnel working for the projects. Finally, the paper will study which components of which programme are functioning comparatively better and why.

Key Words: Livelihood, WASH, Nutrition, Extreme Poor

**TRANSFORMING LANDS,
TRANSFORMING LIVES SANDBAR
CROPPING: AN INNOVATIVE
SOLUTION FOR MILLIONS LIVING
ON THE EDGE OF MIGHTY RIVERS
IN BANGLADESH**



TRANSFORMING LANDS, TRANSFORMING LIVES SANDBAR CROPPING: AN INNOVATIVE SOLUTION FOR MILLIONS LIVING ON THE EDGE OF MIGHTY RIVERS IN BANGLADESH

AZM Nazmul Islam Chowdhury, Head of Extreme Poverty Programme
Practical Action Bangladesh

In Bangladesh, the mighty rivers of the Ganges and Brahmaputra are both vital and threatening to nearby inhabitants. The country criss-crossed by 230 of the world's most unstable rivers, the situation is worsened by flooding that affects millions of people each year, with at least 100,000 women, men and children forced to move as villages and livelihoods are literally washed away. In recent years, flooding has intensified and lasts longer. Monsoon rains cause the rivers to swell, often flooding villages and fields. However, during the other months, drought leaves crops, livestock and communities praying for water. Land is scarce, population density is high and poverty and food security are major concerns, especially in the face of this seasonal feast and famine.

With more than a thousand people per square kilometer, Bangladesh has by far the greatest population density of any similar sized country in the world. Land is scarce, and the flooding and river bank erosion seems to get worse year after year. But, the emerging use of transitional islands now offers some farming families a new way to grow crops on the waterways that otherwise threaten their very existence.

Agriculture production in barren and unproductive sandbar (transitional land in the river basin) is an innovative low cost technology for the river eroded communities, whose villages and farms have been lost through river erosion in NW Bangladesh and who are forced to live illegally on flood protection embankments. The technology has been developed through series of action research since 2005-2009 in Gaibandha NW part of Bangladesh. The innovation was a part of Asia-pacific (APFED) gold award winning Disappearing Lands Project of Practical Action Bangladesh. The end results of this farm based trial has shown highly significant impacts on the resource poor displaced communities providing opportunity for food production in barren lands, handsome income, asset generation, increased consumption & nutrition and alternative risk management during lean season.

After each rainy season, large sandy islands appear in the main rivers of NW Bangladesh. These 'lands' are common property resources and some are privately owned but until now have not been used for any productive purpose. The project has successfully demonstrated that the growing of pumpkins in small compost pits dug into the sand is both possible and profitable. Since its initiation in November

2005 under Disappearing lands project 3273 beneficiaries have produced 33,608 metric tons (from 1100 ha. land by using over 663,928 pits) of pumpkins worth £2.2m net return based on local market value and estimated value at urban market was £5m. The average net return per beneficiaries in four years stood £490 within 5-6 month in each year. The project monitored a representative sample of household's incomes over the period and calculated cost benefit ratios on a regular basis, which staggering average ranging from 1:7 to 1:10 based on investment pattern.

The sandbar cropping measures its achievements by the levels of adoption of the technology by trainees and the spread of the technology to new areas. No credit was supplied to subsidize production system, however minimum inputs i.e. seeds and quick composts/fertilizers were provided to the farmers to run the demonstration. However, the current St. Andrews award winning project "Pathways From Poverty" (2009-2015 in two phases) funded by EEP shree (GoB-DFID) has been supporting extreme poor beneficiaries households with little different approach based on asset transfer mode of project operation (providing full costs for technology demonstration), aiming to help extreme poor household to come out from extreme poverty, having two step graduation during the project cycle in five Northern districts. Under the sub project "sandbar cropping" over 12000 extreme poor beneficiaries households have produced 49,636 MT of pumpkin worth 3.4m GBP based on local market price since 2009-2014.

Based on its multidimensional impacts on the poorer livelihoods, the technology is replicating in wider areas in North-west and could replicate in similar geographical environment in Bangladesh to benefit wide range of people in the production, processing and marketing chain. The pumpkins produced on the sandbars can be stored in people's houses over a year and therefore greatly assist poor households from both income generation and food security perspectives. In addition to the pumpkins, the twigs and flowers of the plant can be used for food, and the entire plant fed to livestock at the end stage, or composted for the following year.

In the dry season in winter. Sandbar cropping transform a barren landscape and these 'mini deserts' into productive green fields which also support a wide range of insect, birds and other small animal species due to the habitat created.

The sandbars that emerge each year as the rivers recede are not stable enough to support natural vegetative growth and remain as a barren sand area until the river rises again. By digging small pits and lining these pits with compost, the project has demonstrated that these areas can be made productive. Large scale irrigation is not necessary as the sand bars are usually close to the river and watering is done by hand in some spots, where water channel is active or water can harvest easily from underground as the layer is very close to the surface. Despite the limitations of hand irrigation sometime, vast sand bar areas have now come under production. Generally, no pesticides or huge application of inorganic inputs are necessary.

Bangladesh is desperately short of arable lands and struggles to feed its growing population. The technology would seem to have a much wider application in other dry areas and could even become an important coping strategy in silted sandy char islands adversely affected by river erosion and climate change.

The sandbar cropping technology developed opens up otherwise unproductive lands and is ideally suited to adoption by very poor, often landless households. The technology appears to be low risk yet shows an impressive financial return. In addition it allows poor households who do not have enough rice, to 'spare' rice for consumption through mixing with pumpkin during lean season or in crisis period. The sand bar cropping idea is so simple and yet to our knowledge, no one had thought of this application until the project first experimented with the idea in 2005. These experiences clearly show how family farmers are able to innovate when their land and livelihood is put under pressure by ever more mouths to feed from the same land, and further threatened by more natural disasters in form of floods and massive erosion. The answer here is to make the best use of any land, however transitional or temporary. In summary, this is just about the best development idea that could replicate to use barren resources and to benefit millions in the near future by formulating appropriate policy to support landless and helpless communities living and struggling for survival in fragile environment in flood and erosion affected parts of Bangladesh.



CONVENTION REPORT



Introduction

The 1st National Char Convention 2015 was held on Saturday, 6 June, 2015 at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh (KIB) Complex, Khamar Bari Road, Farmgate, Dhaka, Bangladesh. With the chorus 'Let the light of development spread over the Chars', this unprecedented national event aimed to end all discrimination and determine a consolidated way forward out of poverty for all char dwellers.

Major Objectives of the 1st National Char Convention 2015:

1. To raise a collective voice, draw policy makers' attention and mobilise resources for char areas with a view to address the many sufferings of char dwellers.
2. To highlight the responsibility of stakeholders to ensure that different services reach remote areas.
3. To declare the National Char Convention Declaration as the Char Peoples' Demand Charter, exploring development issues based on concrete studies conducted by different organisations.

Major Features of the 1st National Char Convention 2015:

1. In addition to the inaugural and closing sessions, six parallel technical sessions were organised in this day-long convention during which, a total of 14 study-based papers were presented by different organisations.
 - Technical Session 1: Human Capital (Health & Education)
 - Technical Session 2: Access to & Control over Resources
 - Technical Session 3: Agriculture & Livelihood
 - Technical Session 4: National Policy & Strategy
 - Technical Session 5: Climate Change & Disaster Management
 - Technical Session 6: Human Rights & Governance
2. More than 1200 participants had attended the Convention, with 60% of them coming from the Char lands.
3. 71 national and international organisations were on board with this cause.
4. A pre-convention general meeting was organised at Chhayanaut Bhaban prior to the Convention that brought together around 200 participants.
5. 8 grassroots level consultations were conducted as a part of developing the National Char Convention Declaration. A sub-committee was also formed to prepare a draft Declaration through national level consultations. The National Char Convention Declaration was declared in the closing session of the Convention.
6. A press conference was organised at National Press Club Conference Lounge prior to the Convention.
7. A website dedicated to the char issues has been developed: www.charbangladesh.com
8. A centrally-managed stall was set up to demonstrate the publications and relevant materials of all the organisations during the Convention.

Inaugural Session

a. Introduction

The 1st National Char Convention 2015 was held on Saturday, 6 June, 2015 at the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh (KIB) Complex in Khamar Bari Road, Farmgate, Dhaka, Bangladesh. The Inaugural session commenced at 10am at the Auditorium of the venue, following the Registration of guests 9am onwards.

b. Guests' Introduction

The Inaugural session began with a welcome speech by **M. Anowar Hossain**, Member Secretary and Coordinator- 1st Char Convention National Committee, and Head of Technical Unit- Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh, during which he greeted more than 1200 participants, including key government officials, ministers, national and international NGO representatives, donor representatives, civil society players, and activists, as well as, people from the Chars. With a brief description of the remote char lands and the plights of the char people living in extreme poverty, he stated that the main objective of this Convention was to create a groundswell of efforts channelled towards the development of the riverine Char lands, especially from the Government of Bangladesh. He then introduced the esteemed panellists as the moderator for the Inaugural session.

Chief Guest: Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP, Honourable Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament; and Chairperson, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Guest of Honour: Priya Powell, Counsellor, Head of Development Cooperation, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

Guest of Honour: A.K.M. Musha, Country Director, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh; and Vice-Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Guest of Honour: Shishir Shil, Secretary General, All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), Bangladesh Parliament; and Vice-Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Guest of Honour: Mahindra Nath Roy, Representative of Char Land

Chairperson: Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled, Chairperson, 1st Char Convention National Committee

c. Discussions

Hailing from Lalmonirhat, esteemed representative of Char land, **Mahindra Nath Roy** was the first panellist to deliver his speech. Mr. Roy highlighted the fact that Bangladesh has made impressive economic and social progress in the past decade, despite repeated natural disasters and external shocks. However, the char lands remain one of the most isolated, deprived and backward regions in Bangladesh. Speaking on behalf of the people living in the char lands, he said that char-dwellers also want to experience this progress, and need the support of the Government of Bangladesh and all other development actors to help push them out of extreme poverty. Citing a lack of infrastructural investments, and a proper service delivery system in char, he said that the char people simply expect to

lead normal lives and avail the same benefits that the people from mainland enjoy. Suggesting that agriculture could be a major focus in char areas as it has the potential to ensure livelihoods of many people, he requested the Honourable Speaker to raise this issue in the Bangladesh Parliament so as to draw the attention of the Prime Minister and other members of the Parliament to take all necessary steps to bring forth a much-needed change in the char people's lives.



Inaugural session in progress

In his speech, Mr Roy expressed his gratitude to Concern Worldwide, Unnayan Shamannay and all other organisations for their support in the socio-economic development of the chars. He said that although the chars have progressed over the years, there is still a lot more to do because the char population has risen compared to 10 years ago and the need for basic amenities still prevails. Mr Roy mentioned that since the char people's struggle for survival remains a constant from the beginning to the end of their lives, it is time that we join forces and help these people because they have been deprived for a long time. He stated that he strongly believed that this convention would be the new beginning for the char people if all the development actors, especially the government, take an active role to make the combined effort sustainable and effective. He reiterated the need for a special allocation for the chars in the national budget and special plans focused that will alleviate extreme poverty in these isolated areas. He ended his speech by saying that the ultimate expectation of the char people is to contribute to the socio-economic development of Bangladesh, and enjoy the same benefits as people from the progressive areas of the country.

Guest of Honour, **Shishir Shil**, Secretary General of the All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), Bangladesh Parliament and Vice-Chair of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, then took the floor and started his speech by thanking everyone attending the day-long Convention. Reflecting on Mr. Roy's speech, he empathised with the daily struggle for survival of the char people. Mentioning the government's special allocation of Tk. 50 crore in the national budget for the development of Char



One of the highlights of the event was the strong representation of char dwellers

lands, Mr. Shil said that he hoped to see significant development and progress of the char lands through the recommendations raised in this convention, and that he was looking forward to work with policy makers and focus more on the people living in the isolated chars of Bangladesh.

Guest of Honour, **A.K.M. Musha**, Country Director of Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh, and Vice-Chair of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, commenced his speech by welcoming all guests, especially the char people who have travelled from afar, to the convention. He said this day-long event will focus on both the problems and prospects of the char lands. Through this convention, he said he hoped to grab the attention of the Government of Bangladesh and all relevant stakeholders to put forward a joint effort to alleviate the sufferings of the Char people.

In his speech, Mr. Musha emphasised on the fact that 2 crore people are currently living below the poverty line in Bangladesh. With such a huge number of people living in unceasing hardship, he said that Bangladesh will not be able to continue the current progress unless the government focuses on improving the char people's state of extreme poverty. He stated that the some of the biggest challenges to the development of char lands are its remoteness and its vulnerability to natural disasters. He mentioned that although the budgetary allocation of Tk 50 crore is commendable, the government needs to assign this money to a specific ministry for this cause. He also added that the budgetary allocation of Tk. 50 crore for the char people's welfare will be of no value if the relevant ministry does not take an active initiative and special planning to ensure proper usage of this allocation.



A.K.M. Musha, Country Director, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh emphasising on utilisation of the allocated Char budget

He mentioned that although many development actors have been working towards alleviating extreme poverty in the char lands, it is crucial that the government to make pro-poor policies that will sustain these efforts and make them work for the poor in the long run. He reiterated that the government needs to play a leadership role in accentuating the combined effort of different NGOs working for the betterment of the lives of char people. He ended his speech by seeking the government's co-operation in achieving the objectives of the 1st National Char Convention 2015.

In her speech, Guest of Honour **Priya Powell**, Counsellor, Head of Development Cooperation of Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), expressed her solidarity with the plights of the char people due to food insecurity, lack of social services, health and educational facilities, etc. She said that DFAT has been supporting 78,000 extreme poor families living in the chars to build their resilience against economic and natural shocks, and grow their capacity to participate in economic activities through the Chars Livelihoods Program (CLP) in partnership with DFID and the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives. In her speech, she pointed out that although CLP-2 has contributed to transformational change for thousands of extreme poor households in the chars, she was concerned that the project will end in 2016 without contributing to any significant shift in government policy and investment for the extreme poor.



Priya Powell, Head of DFAT making her commitments towards sustainable char development

Ms. Powell recognised the aspiration of Bangladesh to be a middle income country by 2021, but she said that it is important that this transition is inclusive so that all Bangladeshis, including the 6 million people from isolated island chars across 100 upazilas of 32 districts of the country, can be part of this development. She also appreciated different strategic decisions made by the Government of Bangladesh, especially drawing attention to the approved National Social Security Strategy (NSSS) in June which adopted a lifecycle approach and set out commitments to provide and/or expand benefits to

older people, people with disabilities, vulnerable women and children. She concluded her speech by saying that the Australian High Commission was proud to be able to support this convention, and that she was looking forward to purposeful and constructive outcomes through this event.

Chief Guest **Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP**, Honourable Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament, and Chairperson of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, then took the floor to thank the organisers, and welcome the guests to the convention. In her speech, she recognised that the Government of Bangladesh is facilitating various development programmes to eradicate extreme poverty, including a special preference for char areas in the Annual Development Plan. Highlighting that Bangladesh has managed to reduce the percentage of people living below the poverty line from 40% to



Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Honorable Speaker, Bangladesh National Parliament making solidarity with Char people's expectation as Chief Guest

23.5%, she mentioned that the government is providing various hardship allowances to the poor that are being funded by the government's tax revenue. She suggested that we should aim not only to reduce poverty, but also to reduce inequality among the classes.

She reiterated that special planning and projects were needed from the government's side in order to support the char people. She mentioned that although there was a budgetary allocation made for the char people in the last fiscal year, the allocated resources were not consumed for the development of the char land till date. She said that it was crucial to analyse why the resources were not utilised on time. She also mentioned that the issues of char the people will be included in the government's upcoming 7th Five Year plan.

Dr. Chaudhury said that the aim of this convention is to garner a collective voice for the char people and attract the attention of relevant stakeholders and call for their urgent contribution to this cause. She mentioned that convention should not be seen as just as a stand-alone event, but the findings and recommendations featured in this convention must be taken into account and focused on. She concluded her speech by recommending the arrangement of a special workshop for all Members of the Parliament from Char areas so

as to sensitise them to the needs of the Char people, and pave the way for sequential government intervention in the Char areas.

In his speech, **Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled**, Chairperson of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, greeted all guests to the convention, and gave special thanks to all the people from the chars who had travelled from afar to attend this convention. In his speech, he agreed with the Chief Guest's speech that development should be inclusive, and that there should be no room for discrimination when working towards inclusive development. Stating that the main challenge faced by char people is their isolation from the mainland, he called for combined efforts to minimise this challenge and emphasised on the need for inclusive development so that no one is left behind.

Mr. Khaled recommended that NGOs and the government should work together in order to achieve the collective goal of eradicating extreme poverty from the char lands. In his speech, he mentioned that it will be possible for the char people to become self-sufficient if they get the necessary support from the government and NGOs in the fields of agriculture, health, education, etc. Since there is a lack of skilled doctors in the char areas, he suggested that the rural medical practitioners can be trained to treat people once the NGOs give them proper training which will be supported by the government. Similarly, the lack of teachers in the chars can be met by recruiting older students who have passed Class 7 or 8 as teachers for junior classes when they are not attending classes themselves. In his speech, he also called for a special 10% quota for Char people to ensure their employment in Bangladesh or abroad. He also called on the NGOs to propose and implement innovate project ideas so that the government can take them forward if these projects are sustainable in the longer term. Mr. Khaled concluded his speech by making a personal promise that he will connect the NGOs with the concerned ministries to utilise the allocated budget of Tk 50 crore effectively.



Dr. Ibrahim Khaled, Chairperson of National Char Alliance and Char Convention National Committee was sharing convention's overall purpose and expectations of the convention with participants

d. Crest handover to Chief Guest

The inaugural session was concluded through a crest handover to Chief Guest Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP, Honourable Speaker of Bangladesh Parliament, and Chairperson of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, as a token of appreciation for her successful leadership throughout her tenure. This crest was handed over to the Honourable Speaker by Mossammat Jahanara Begum, leader of Community Based Organisation (CBO) of Char Narayanpur from Chapai Nawabganj district, on behalf of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, representatives of all participating organisations, as well as, the char people attending the convention.

The crest handover marked the end of the inaugural session of the 1st National Char Convention 2015; following which, the technical sessions were held simultaneously at 3 different halls of the same venue from 11:30am onwards.



Mossammat Jahanara Begum, CBO leader of Char Narayanpur from Chapai Nawabganj district, handing over a crest to the Honourable Speaker on behalf of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, representatives of all participating organisations, as well as, the char people attending the convention.

Technical Session 1

HUMAN CAPITAL (HEALTH AND EDUCATION)

a. Introduction:

The Technical Session 1, titled Human Capital (Health and Education) was held in the Auditorium of Krishibid Institution Bangladesh. The session focused on the existing the problems in health and education services for the char dwellers and the ways of addressing them.

b. Guests' Introduction:

The session was moderated by Runa Khan, Founder and Executive Director of Friendship. The distinguished guests and the keynote paper presenters in the panel included:

Chief Guest: Md. Motahar Hossain, MP, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Bangladesh Parliament

Special Guest: Rasheda K Chowdhury, Executive Director, CAMPE and Vice Chair, 1st Char convention National Committee

Keynote Presenter: Rama Hansraj, Assistant Country Director, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Keynote Presenter: Dr. Md. Khaliquzzaman, Associate Professor, BSMMU

Designated Discussant: Dr. Rashid-E-Mahbub, Former President, Bangladesh Medical Association

Designated Discussant: M Habibur Rahman, Education Sector Advisor, Save the Children

Chairperson: Shabel Firuz, Country Director, Islamic Relief, Bangladesh and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee.

c. Keynote Presentations:

"A glimpse of education and the paths of improving quality education in isolated chars in Bangladesh"- Rama Hansraj, Assistant Country Director, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

i) Issue Synopsis:

Given the geographical isolation, environmental vulnerability and extreme poverty, approximately, 6 million people char dwellers live with inadequate and low quality of services in education, health, and livelihood. The study explored the existing scenario of primary education with focus on access to and quality of education, school governance and community participation in the island chars of Bangladesh. It was based on quantitative survey and qualitative data collection using KIIs, school and community level conversations and observations. The sample coverage included 30 schools with the sample of 310



Rama Hansraj, Assistant Country Director, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh is giving presentation on 'A glimpse of education and the paths of improving quality education in isolated Chars in Bangladesh' at Human Capital (Health and Education) session.

students, 315 Community households and geographical area which covered 22 Unions of 10 Upazilas under Pabna, Lalmonirhat and Chapai Nawabganj Districts of Bangladesh.

ii. Study Findings:

The study found that the reading fluency of the char school students is only 14.73 CWPM and only 11% could touch the 45 words. The minimum Standard level of fluency is ≥ 45 -60 CWPM. The adult literacy rate is found to be only 25%. No significant NGOs were working on education in the study area. 100% schools experienced loss of contact hours (<800) due to natural hazards. The lack of assets, opportunity and hidden cost of education, perceived low return and absence of parental participation enforce the backwardness in education. High impact of natural calamities especially annual flooding affects all 100% study areas in terms of damage of schools, loss of learning hours, slow recovery after floods, and loss of interest. Weak supervision and monitoring by the local education department, limited access, logistics support, high teacher and student ratio and poor school governance also contribute as major factors. In comparison to the national enrolment in primary education of 97.3%, the enrolment in char areas is 74%. Similarly, the primary school completion rate is 10% below the national average.

iii. Recommendations

Based on the study, Ms. Hansraj recommended increasing the number of schools to ensure access to schooling is improved. Considering the health impacts related to water and sanitation, arsenic burden in

the area and menstrual hygiene, provision of safe water and sanitation facilities are keys to educational outcomes. Trained quality teachers by improving the professional capacity, commitment and motivation of the teachers are imperative. Provisioning of appropriate facilities like hardship allowances and logistical support during flooding seasons will encourage trained educational professionals further. In improving school governance, activating the SMC and PTA are important. The study also recommended for arranging alternative and safe learning facilities during disasters and ensuring nutritional supports to the char school children. Also, appropriate and adequate social safety nets and increased budget allocation for education were identified as solutions to the problem.

Keynote Presentations:

“Healthcare seeking behavior and facilities available in char areas of Bangladesh” by Dr. Md Khaliqzaman, Associate Professor, Department of Public Health and Informatics, BSMMU

i. Issue Synopsis:

Dr. Khaliqzaman started his presentation by giving a brief background about the Char lands in Bangladesh. He then went on to point out that the Char dwellers are at increased health risks due to lack of safe water supply and sanitation, low education and unavailability of health services. Thus, the cross sectional study explored the existing healthcare facilities as well as the health seeking behavior of the people of Char in Bangladesh. With a multi stage sample, 432 (four hundred and thirty two) people



Dr. Md. Khaliqzaman, Associate Professor, BSMMU Bangladesh is giving presentation on 'Healthcare seeking behavior and facilities available in char areas of Bangladesh' at Human Capital (Health and Education) session.

(216 each from villages of both Gaibandha and Shirajgonj district) were interviewed. It was also based on the interviews of 21 health service providers and FGDs.



M Habibur Rahman, Education Sector Advisor, Save the Children International while speaking at Human Capital (Health and Education) session.

ii. Study Findings

Of the respondents of the study, 52.4% had no formal education. From the last 12 months' disease history, it was evident that 94% of the adult family members had cough and/or fevers. Same trend was observed among the children also. It was found that mean treatment cost for a family in last 12 months was 6552.84 Taka. Traditionally homeopathy, village doctor, pharmacy personal, kobiraj and hakim are the most available source for treatment for the people of Char area. More than eighty percent (82.4%) of the respondents in char area preferred this traditional treatment. About half of the respondents mentioned that their family members went to the community clinics, and of them 51% went there due to the availability of free medicine. This free medicine issue is also mentionable for the Upazilla Health Complexes. Only 17.6% respondents had the practice of going to the Union Health Complex. Of them, most were discouraged by the distance of the hospital from the village along with the transportation cost. Majority (66.4%) of the respondents did not prefer private hospitals/chambers for treatment. About two third of the respondents mentioned that they did not go the NGO clinics. Three fourth of the respondents receive health-related information from friends.

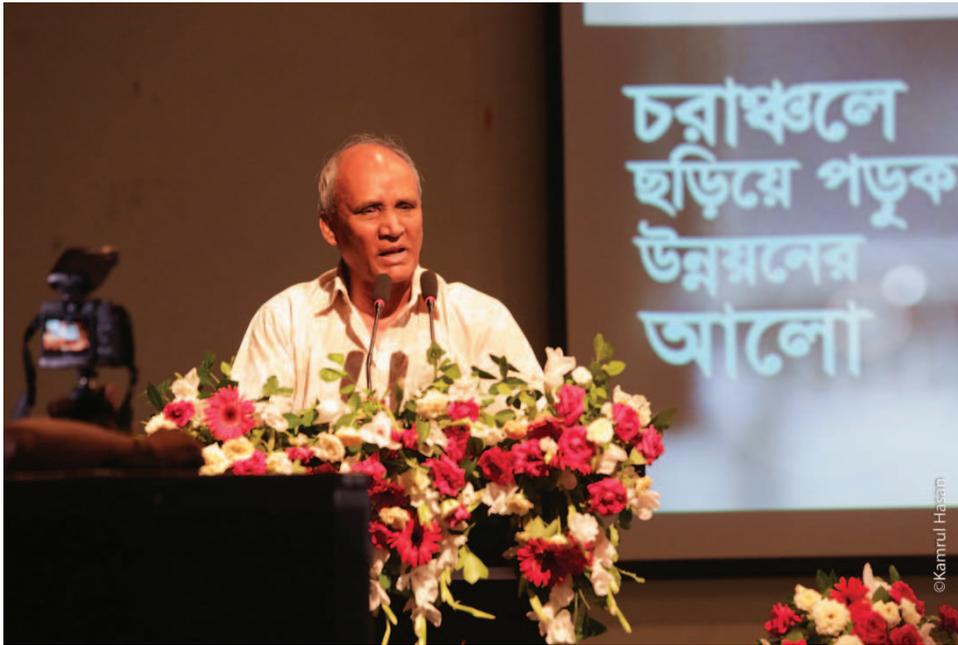
iii. Recommendations:

The study concludes that with limited formal education, most of the Char dwellers adopted alternative medical practices. Access to health services is one of the main problems. Similarly, the lack of money has consequences for the utilisation of health care. Result from the study recommends strengthening of community clinics as well as improvement of communication infrastructure. Furthermore, promotional

activities for existing health care facilities, increasing in literacy rate and introduction of opportunity card for the ultra-poor can have far reaching impact in improving the health condition of the poor in char.

d. Discussions

Commenting on the presentations, designated discussant, **Dr. Rashid-E-Mahbub** said that the issues of education and health are different in nature. He said that the current provisions or standards of education and health in char are not acceptable. This is because majority of medical treatment is being provided by the village quacks. He recommended that medical treatment needs to be provided in the existing setting i.e. the village quacks needs to be trained so that their medical practices are safe and accepted. Mr. Mahbub said that a person is required to spend TK.4,500 for healthcare per year and it is the State's responsibility to ensure that this amount is within the affordability of everybody, including the Char people. He recommended for appropriate regulatory system for the practitioners. He also opined that there had been contradictory proposals in the budget in regards to healthcare and education. Terming treatment and education as essentials, he projected that poverty will only increase in such areas if they are not addressed. He concluded his discussion by further recommending proper sanitation, safe water and treatment for non-communicable diseases.



Dr. Rashid-E-Mahbub, Former President, Bangladesh Medical Association while speaking at Human Capital (Health and Education) session.

M Habibur Rahman, Education Sector Advisor, Save the Children International and a designated discussant in the session began his discussion by agreeing with Ms. Hansraj. He stated that there is a requirement for a broader description and consideration of the land mass. This information then needs to be analysed accordingly. In order to develop adequate policies, he recommended the formulation of a team to work towards char development. Pointing out to the requirements of school and trained teachers, Mr. Rahman suggested for training the teachers in an open university. He concluded his speech by recommending incentives for the teachers in order to encourage them to receive the training.

Rasheda K Chowdhury, Executive Director, CAMPE and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee, spoke as a special guest in the session. She stated that she is saddened by the fact that the budget allocation for the education and health has decreased. She opined that if everybody collectively demand for adequate budget allocation, then it is indeed possible to grab the attention of the policy makers. She firmly said that no development will be possible without education. Furthermore, char people need to be provided with proper information so that they can make informed choices. She drew the analogy that the existing practice is to inject or give pills to the girls but there is no emphasis in other birth control measures particularly involving men. Ms. Chowdhury concluded her speech by recommending allocation of special allowance for teachers and health workers, similar to the allocation for the Pahari/indigenous workers, to make a sustainable change in char.

The chief guest of the session, **Md Motahar Hossain**, MP, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Bangladesh Parliament empathised with the Char people's struggle for the last 30 years. He said that the development of the nation would not be possible without the sustainable development of Char. Addressing river erosion is very important in the development of the education and health care sector. He reassured the present guests that the ministry is in the process of introducing special allowances for the impoverished.

Mr. Hossain shared his experience of personally employing 18 local Char people to provide education in the Char areas, but they had left their jobs. It is not only the increase of salary that will result in teacher retention, but the overall living condition of the char areas has to be improved. Prevention of river erosion is a pre-condition in alleviating the condition of char. At the same time, the char people must be made aware of their rights as citizens to create scope for their own development. He lamented the fact that doctors visit the clinic only when they hear that the MP is coming to visit. He expressed his disappointment in budget allocation because of the decreasing amount allotted for education and health. He concluded his speech by stating that there is a need to start a revolution for the development of char people for ensuring better health care and education.

e. Open Floor Discussion:

Mosammat Sharia Begum from Lalmonirhat complained about the absence of doctors in the clinics in the char areas. She also demanded to know what measures are being taken to repair the clinics eroded by river. **Abul Mazumder** of Kurigram pointed out that the poor communication system is the major reason behind lack of teacher and doctors. He suggested for arrangement of boats or suitable transportation for communication.

Haider Ali from Lalmonirhat suggested for providing special housing at special rates for the teachers to encourage them to remain in the char area and do their job better. One audience member recommended the Union Parishads to provide attractive package with a high salary as incentives for teachers and doctors. He also recommended that if a son or daughter of family is able to enroll higher education institutions such as engineering and medical schools or Dhaka University, then the Government could bear their educational expenses as an incentive.

Dr Rabiul, working in the Urban Health Board for the past 20 years, raised the question whether the stakeholders were going to act upon the recommendations made in the convention. He opined that the maximum health services in the char areas are being provided by the NGOs which have not been highlighted in the presentations. He also called for better coordination between the UHB, NGOs and GOs in order to ensure better services. One audience member suggested that the salinity affected coastal char needs to be addressed in the policies. Another participant raised the question whether it is possible to appoint new internee doctors to the neglected areas.

f. Chairperson's Concluding Remarks

The chairperson of the session, **Shabel Firuz**, Country Director, Islamic Relief, Bangladesh and Vice Chair, 1st Char convention National Committee concluded the session by summarising all the discussion that took place. He recommended creating a national hotline to report irregularities of the healthcare workers and teachers in the char areas. Mr. Firuz emphasised on accountability and transparency as two determining factors in the development of education and healthcare sectors of char.



Technical Session 2

ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OVER RESOURCE

a. Introduction:

The session on Access to and Control over Resources was held from 11.30 am to 1.30 pm at the 3D Hall of the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh. The session was moderated by **Shaheen Anam**, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee. Representatives of the government and civil society organisations were present as honourable guests, while two research based papers were presented in the session.

b. Guests' Introduction:

Shaheen Anam started the proceedings by drawing attention to the pertinence of the topic of the access to and control of the land for the improvised char people. She then introduced the distinguished guests and the keynote paper presenters of the session.

Chief Guest: Md Abdul Wadud, MP, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Food, Bangladesh Parliament

Special Guest: A. K. M. Zahangir Hossain, MP, Former State Minister, Ministry Of Textiles and Jute

Special Guest: A L M Abdur Rahman, Additional Secretary, Ministry Of Water Resources

Special Guest: Khushi Kabir, Coordinator, Nijera Kori

Keynote Presenter: Hemayet Uddin, Project Manager, Land Rights Programme, Speed Trust

Keynote Presenter: Md. Abdur Razzak Khalifa, Chairman, Ulania Social Welfare Society (USWS)

c. Keynote Presentations:

'Is land rights utterly an illusion for landless Char dwellers?' - Hemayet Uddin, Project Manager, Land Rights Programme, Speed Trust

This paper highlighted the findings of a survey conducted by Speed Trust in 10 remote char areas of Bauphal and Dashmina upazillas of Patuakhali district in the Barisal division.

i. Issue Synopsis:

Approximately 5% of the total population live in the char areas, while 60% of them are landless. The combinations of social, political and natural causes push more people towards landless state. Despite the uncertainty and insecurity emerging from the landlessness, the rising chars in the river also posse



Hemayet Uddin, Project Manager, Land Rights Programme, Speed Trust is presenting at the session

potential for getting a piece land. The administration has limitations in terms of the proper identification and measurement of khas lands (government owned land). There are also significant challenges in selecting and enlisting the marginalised landless people. In the case of distributing khas land, there exists a lack of knowledge of the land rights, while the handover of the land is unduly prolonged.

ii. Study Findings:

The study found that the meetings of the Zilla and Upazilla Khas Land Management and Settlement committees do not meet regularly. There is also a lack of initiative in managing the newly arising land in the char areas. According to the study, river erosion, landlessness and pursuit of livelihood causes people to live in the char. Only 39% land of char has legitimate ownership, while 29.6% live in their households permanently with legal documentation. 67.6% of the cultivable land is illegally occupied, while 80 % of the illegal occupiers live in the mainland. 71.18% of the respondents identified the land encroachers as the main reason behind the poverty of the char. Furthermore, discrimination is apparent in the management and settlement of khas land.

iii. Recommendations

The study recommended that the appropriate measurement and distribution of khas land by identifying the proper landless with the participation of the local people. It pointed out the necessity of taking legal action to distribute the illegally encroached land among the landless. Construction of embankment for the coastal chars, resolution of the inter-district boundary conflict and determining the amount of land under the forest department were identified as important. Finally, the study called for a special policy is addressing the land issues of the char people.

Keynote Presentation:

'Water Resource Management in Coastal Belt' - Md. Abdur Razzak Khalifa, Chairman, Ulania Social Welfare Society (USWS)

This paper highlighted the challenges and opportunities of the water resource management of the coastal belt char areas.

i. Issue Synopsis:

Although the coastal belt plays a vital role in the national economy, yet the coastal belt of Bangladesh is one of the depressed, if not neglected, regions of the country. About 53% of the coastal areas are affected by salinity. Agricultural land use in these areas is very poor, with much lower average cropping intensity. Salinity causes unfavourable environment and hydrological situation that restrict the normal crop production throughout the year. Most of these lands remain fallow in the dry (Rabi/Boro) and pre-monsoon (Aush) seasons because of perceived high soil and water salinity and lack of good quality irrigation water. Productivity of Aman rice is particularly low in most of these coastal areas because of excessive flooding (either partial or complete) and less adoption of suitable high yielding varieties (HYV) of rice. Farmers are reluctant to use HYV because they are short stature, easily submerged and damaged by tidal fluctuations. But the excess water could easily be drained out during low tide through managing the sluice gates of the coastal polders constructed by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). Unfortunately many of the sluices do not function properly and farmers lack the knowhow to operate them. Improving drainage in the monsoon season would help in cultivation of HYV Aman rice and also early establishment of Rabi crops in the coastal areas of the country.



A member of Bangladesh Krishan Shobha speaking about land rights at the session

ii. Study Findings

The study finds soil salinity as a major constraint of coastal belt. Scarcity of quality irrigation water during dry season limits cultivation of Boro rice and Rabi (winter) crops, and Aush cultivation during

kharif-1 (March-July) season. Variability of rainfall, uncertain dates of onset, recession of seasonal floods and risk of drought restrict cultivation of Aush and Aman rice are also major management issues. Perennial water-logging due to inadequate drainage and faulty operation of sluice gate facilities restricts potential land use of the low lands. The lack of appropriate extension programmes for diffusion of modern technologies also hampers the water management. Big land ownership and unfavourable land tenure system and dominance of absentee farmers discourage adoption of modern technologies.

iii. Recommendations:

The presentation articulated the importance of protective embankment, provision of sluice gate on the embankment and storing of excess rainwater for irrigation as important components of the strategy for management of coastal salinity. Furthermore, selection of rice variety, introduction of crop in Rabi (winter) season, and provision of sub-surface drainage were also recommended. As the water of the rivers and canals of Barisal remains useable for crop production for about 10 months, there are opportunities to grow three crops per year by utilising rainfall, river and canal water resources. For Khulna region, utilisation of residual soil moisture and rainwater can help to grow Rabi crop. Dissemination and extension of climate resilient agricultural adaptation, water management infrastructures development and management, adoption of stress-tolerant crops and women's involvement in agriculture were emphasised for water resource management in the presentation.

d. Discussions

In his speech, special guest **A.K.M. Zahangir Hossain**, Former State Minister, Ministry Of Textiles and Jute pointed out the complications and possible ways of solving the land issues of char. Drawing from his experience, Mr. Hossain said that the selection process of the khas land and its distribution is faulty. The complications in law can cause the same property to be registered to many individuals. The char map inaccurately show existence of land where in reality there is no land. Although there are Khas Land Management and Settlement committees in existence, yet they are hardly active in the field. Bureaucratic complications also cause problems in Khas land acquisition. He also pointed out to the dysfunctional state of the upazila committees

Mr. Hossain said that under the Ordinance of 1973, the emerging land char should be included for afforestation; while the compact land should give away to those who are landless. Yet authorities file cases against the rightful owners, the landless people, and start afforestation to earn money. The speaker thus proposed for a common committee including the char people representatives and government and non-government organisations. He emphasised the importance of the NGOs of providing the social services. Articulating irrigation and agriculture as the basic needs of the char area, he said that the solutions to the problems of the char people should be sought in a collective way. Finally, a comprehensive char development plan needs to be formulated by the government to bring sustainable development in char.

Special guest **A.L.M. Abdur Rahman**, Additional Secretary, Ministry Of Water Resources highlighted the importance of safe water, sanitation, and sustainable water services for the development of char areas. He said that Bangladesh fosters a riverine culture and the lives of the people are always dependent on water. But in the char areas, particularly in the coastal chars, there is a glaring lack of pure and safe



Chief guest Md. Abdul Wadud, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Food, Bangladesh Parliament delivering his speech at the session

drinking water. The scarcity of water becomes more evident during the times of flood and drought. During drought in the dry season, the water level sinks well beneath the reach of the regular tube wells. The situation is reversed in the flood of the rainy season; as the surface water level gets high sinking the source of water along with it.

The adverse impact of the climate change and the associated erratic rainfalls posse significant challenges for the marginalised areas such as char. Yet to ensure the development of Bangladesh, it is greatly important to provide sanitation and safe drinking water services to the people all across the country. The availability of water resources, sufficient access to safe drinking water and proper management of water resources are the key factor to consider.

Mr. Rahman then highlighted various government initiatives to meet the continued demand for clean water. The Bangladesh Water Act 2012 is a positive step in the process, while the water development board has built many embankments in the coastal area in recent years. The Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) has taken many initiatives to construct roads for better communication. He also pointed out the positive roles played by the Department of Public Health Engineering, Ministry of Environment and Forest, and the Ministry of Land in the respective sectors. Mr. Rahman said that the government is working to ensure the coordination of the ministries and departments to have the maximum impact. He opined that 1.5 acre of land should be handed over to the poor families and arrangement of safe drinking water should start as soon as possible.

Special guest **Khushi Kabir**, Coordinator, Nijera Kori talked about the issues of distribution of khas land and the prevalent gender discrimination. She recommended that in planning the development of char, differences in the various char areas should be taken into account. Ms. Kabir said that despite the abundance of khas land, it is the lack of accountability, not the weakness of law that prevents the impoverished char dwellers from owning the rightful khas land. Many acts have been passed but the failure to enforce them has caused the land grabbers to thrive unchecked. Ms. Kabir also said the many

of the khas land is allotted for the government's agricultural projects. Furthermore, army and government projects are given prioritised in allotting land. But this is contrary to the rights of the landless families, the lawfully deserving owners.

Ms. Kabir pointed out to the gender discrimination in land distribution in the char areas. Women have no ownership of land, and despite having their photos in the registration, they are being deprived of their rightful ownership of land by their husbands. She said that land should be registered under both husband and wife. If they are divorcing, each should still have the equal ownership of that unit of land in accordance with the registration. She also emphasised that a capable daughter should equal justification to inherit land as a capable son. Ms. Kabir also emphasised that comprehensive sustainable development is needed to alleviate the condition of char areas.

The Chief Guest of the session, **Md. Abdul Wadud, MP**, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Food, Bangladesh Parliament began his speech by warmly greeting the present char dwellers, paper presenters, development workers and other participants. He resonated the voice of many, stating that there are considerable amount of khas land in the char areas but the landless char dwellers do not get their fair share due to political, social and economic reasons. The newly surfaced land causes fight among char dwellers every year. Political elites, ruffian and powerful people forcefully occupy the land. Establishing the rights of the landless people can be a very effective measure to reduce the poverty level of char.

Mr. Wadud said that though Bangladesh is food sufficient but there is no doubt that the people under the poverty line are vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity. The lack of food and the inability to purchase them has resulted in the undernutrition of the char people. The drought season is harsh on the lives of the char people due to insufficiency of work. This pushes the char people to come to urban areas to meet their demand of foods and work. He also highlighted the dearth of productive work, low productive land, improper distribution of khas land, lack of suitable agricultural crop varieties and natural disasters as the reasons behind the food insecurity of the char people.

Mr. Wadud praised the efforts of the government in distributing the khas land among those landless peoples. Alluding to the commitment of the government, he said the government has allotted BDT 50 crores for the development char in the national budget. The government has and will continue to aggressively pursue the causes of women's empowerment as its development agenda. He also emphasised on the importance of government and non-government development actors' collaboration. He said that being present in the convention has enabled him to closely observe and understand the problems of the char people. Mr. Wadud expressed his commitment to address the issues.

e. Open Floor Discussion:

In the open floor session, the participating char dwellers were asked to share their opinions. **Nasrin Akhtar** from Rajshahi, alluding to the deprivation of the char dwellers asked, "Are we human?" She said that they are devoid of every right. There is no good teacher to get proper education and the health provisions are poor. Flood damage their crops while local goons torment them continually. She said that without improving the condition of health and education, and removing the goons, their fate will not change. Other participants also expressed their discontent saying that the char people are looked down upon. Despite their efforts, they cannot turn their wheel of luck for the better. They demanded that the land grabbers are punished and the char lands be distributed to the landless people.

f. Chairperson's Concluding Remarks

In her concluding speech, **Shaheen Anam**, the Moderator and Chairperson of the session praised the lively discourse. She said that it effectively captures the condition of the char people and lack of ownership of resources. The present laws are not in application, as such the char people are being deprived of their rights. Furthermore, the people lack security of their lives and livelihood. She thanked the char people for sharing their experiences and said that their opinions have been noted. Ms. Anam expressed her optimism that the specific recommendations received from the convention will be implemented to ensure the development of all the char dwellers.



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Technical Session 3

AGRICULTURE AND LIVELIHOOD

a. Introduction:

The third session of the convention that took place in the Basement Cafeteria of Krishibid Institute Bangladesh (KIB) dealt with the agriculture and livelihood conditions of the Char people. Three research papers were presented in this session to positive response. A rigorous and open discussion took place after the presentation and the session ended with alluding to the ways of improving the Char people's life in respect to agriculture and livelihood arena.



A section of Participants during parallel session

b. Guests' Introduction:

The session was moderated by Anowarul Haque, Director- Extreme Rural Poverty, CARE-Bangladesh. The session was attended by the following panelists

Chief Guest: Md. Mokbul Hossain, MP, Honorable Chairperson, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh National Parliament.

Special Guest: Fazle Hossain Badsha, Honorable MP, Rajshahi-2, Bangladesh National Parliament

Special Guest: M. A. Matin, Project Director, Char Livelihood Programme-CLP and Director General, Rural Development Academy-RDA

Keynote Presenter: Shah Muntamin Mujtaba, Programme Coordinator-North, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Keynote Presenter: Dr Mahbub Alam, Livelihoods Coordinator, CLP

Keynote Presenter: Fouzia Nasreen, General Manager, M4C, Swisscontact

Designated Discussant: AKM Zakaria, Director, Agriculture Sciences Division, Rural Development Academy

Designated Discussant: Yarun Begum, President, Golna Community Based Organisation-CBO, Gaibandha.

Chairperson: Professor Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Open University

c. Keynote Presentation

'Dry Chili Market in Bangladesh: Present Challenge and Opportunities' -Shah Muntamin Mujtaba, Programme Coordinator-North, Oxfam in Bangladesh

i) Issue Synopsis:

About 355,673 acre of char land is under chili cultivation in Bangladesh, with approximately 440,000 farmers involved in chili cultivation, harvesting and processing. Due to the disasters and impact of climate change and lack of knowledge in post harvesting management, the producers are not able to maintain the quality as per the market requirements. The quality and prices of imported chili is influencing the local and national buyers to buy imported special chili from India. The increasing flow of Indian imported chili creates an unfavorable condition for the chili growers, newly formed cooperative farms and the country on the whole.



Keynote speaker Shah Muntamin Mujtaba, Oxfam in Bangladesh, presenting the research findings at the session

ii. Study Findings:

Oxfam in Bangladesh has been implementing Enterprise Development Program (EDP) in the remotest char areas of Gaibandha District. EDP intervention is creating opportunities for smallholder women chili producers of Char areas to link up with the market. Drawing from the programme, the study conducted in the Fulchari area of Gaibandha district sheds light on the condition of the dry chili market. It finds that although both area under chili cultivation and its total production are decreasing over the years, yet yield per hectare has been increasing over time. Total annual demand for dry chili is recorded about 292,000 MT while the supply is about 172,000 MT, indicating a gap of around 120,000 MT. This gap is usually meet up by both formal and informal (legal and illegal) imports of dry chilli, mostly from India.

Despite being imported from India, price of imported dry chili is relatively less than that of local dry chili. The study found that the purchase price of 1 KG imported chili ranges between BDT 108-120; native chili costs around BDT 120-140. Driven by the motive of 'extra profit', traders in Fulchari Haat are more interested towards imported chili with lower price.

iii. Recommendations:

Given the productivity of chili in the char areas, it is important to reduce dependency on imported chilies by increasing domestic production. In order to restrict informal and illegal import of dry chili, improved quality of chili seed and technology needs to be introduced. Chili should be further prioritised in the government Import Policy with upgrading it from the medium priority to high priority sector.

Keynote Presentation

“Resilient Livelihoods: CLP’s Multi-Sectoral Approach to Promoting Livelihoods and Reducing Poverty in the Chars” -Dr. Mahbub Alam, Livelihoods Coordinator, Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP), Bangladesh

i) Issue Synopsis:

The presentation highlighted CLP’s successful model for building resilience and reducing vulnerability of the extreme poor in north western island chars of Bangladesh. To address the physical, economic, social and institutional vulnerabilities of the char dwellers, CLP adopts an integrated approach comprising a core package. CLP defines livelihood’s resilience with six criteria comprising income/ expenditure/ consumption, nutrition, asset base, status of females, vulnerability and access to service.



Keynote speaker Dr. Mahbub Alam presenting at the session

ii) Study Findings:

CLP has found that its approach and model of building resilience has yielded very positive results. In reducing the physical vulnerability, raised plinths have been adapted by 80% of the participants. The study found less than 4% of households experienced flooding after receiving CLP support, compared to over 97% before. It found that with CLP's support, access to clean water has increased from 5% to 70%, while access to sanitation has increased from 7% to 80%. The project also increased food security of the target beneficiaries, with 81% having three meals with five food groups a day, compared to 37% at the beginning.

CLP's approach has brought change in livelihood of the poor, by raising average income from Tk 18.62 to Tk 43 per day. Similarly, average cash savings has increased from Tk 52.18 to Tk 3,946.34. With CLP's support, the productive asset increased to Tk 52,328 from Tk 1,686 with 61.7% of the households' productive assets doubling after receiving their asset. Similar positive effects were brought in decreasing the dependence on wage labor. Furthermore, CLP has created a Chars Empowerment Scorecard with 10 criteria, where more than 90% female participants passed empowerment criteria. The presentation showed the successful case story of Anowara, who has successfully improved her livelihood conditions with the assistance of the program.

iii. Recommendations:

The presentation recommended involvement of government to provide basic services such as education and health to bring sustainable change to the lives of the impoverished char people. Furthermore, improving market linkage and behavior change with attention to women's empowerment are integral components to alleviate poverty in char.

Keynote Presentation

'Making Markets Work for the Chars' -Fouzia Nasreen, General Manager, M4C, Swisscontact

i. Issue Synopsis:

The presentation focused on 'Making Markets Work for the Jamuna, Padma and Teesta Chars' (M4C) project's intervention to reduce poverty and vulnerability of char households in ten districts of northern Bangladesh by facilitating market systems. Its strategy include changing the market system by making the public and private sector realise the potential of the chars and continue to provide services. M4C partners with relevant private and public entities to improve services to the char households and supports innovative, sustainable and char-suitable models. M4C also addresses issues related to Women's Economic Empowerment (WEE) and Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in its activities within sectors.



Keynote speaker Fouzia Nasreen presenting at the session

ii. Study Findings:

M4C has successfully built partnerships with public agencies through MoUs with BJRI, BARI, and DAE. In addition to partnership with various private companies, the programme has raised BDT 3.20 Crore (38%) worth funding. 1,000 Agro-input Retailers were trained and linked to five leading agro-input companies, while 105,000 farmers (35% of them female) were trained on use of appropriate and quality agro-inputs, and linked to company representatives, SAAOs and trained retailers. Furthermore, 52,000 HHs benefited from the intervention with improved access to services for 21,000 women to enhance their economic roles. The use of wind-resistant seed varieties and other agro-inputs resulted in reduction of disaster losses by 20-40% for char households.



A section of the participants during parallel session

iii. Recommendations:

The presentation recommended the formation of a committee or foundation by the government focusing char development with special focus on char infrastructure development. It also called for enhanced focus of the national media on the potential of char and facilitation of dialogue between public and private sector. Building capacity of the local stakeholders to achieve sustainability and of farmers on DDR issues are also important. Furthermore, women's capacity to enhance involvement in economic activities needs to be emphasised while financial inclusion through promoting mobile financial services were also recommended.

d. Discussions:

Yarun Begum, President, Golna Community Based Organization-CBO of Phulchari, Gaibandha remarked that although the condition of char people has considerably improved over the last years, yet a lot remainXs to be done. The people are less superstitious than before and have become more rational and open. In addition to the treat on their habitat due to the environmental factors, the char people lack

proper education, transportation and health facilities. Access to schools and health facilities are challenged without proper transportation and infrastructure. The health clinics sometimes do not have medicines other than tablets for pain and headaches. She also expressed optimism pointing out that the char people have successfully managed to grow good chilies. But access to market and good storage facilities are necessary for the people to prosper.



Yarun Begum, CBO leader, sharing her experience during open discussion as Char people's representative

A.K.M. Zakaria, Director, Agriculture Sciences Division, Rural Development Academy, said that dry chili is a significant crop in the Char lands. He called for special attention to this crop by the government and non-government actors for the sector to flourish. Mr. Zakaria praised CLP's work in the char, saying that some beneficiaries view the programme as 'hands of God'. He also pointed out M4C's work in the jute sector in char that have successfully done government's work for the development of the char people. In terms of government's efforts, he informed that Char Development Resource Center has been opened in the Rural Development Academy that can help to support nongovernment initiatives. Finally, he expressed his commitment to work together with all the stakeholders for the development of char.

In his speech, special guest **M. A. Matin**, Project Director, CLP and Director General, RDA emphasised on the existing gap between the government, development partners and NGOs. He said the government is working for the development of the char people, while the NGOs are also working in their capacity. However, the NGO projects are Direct Project Aid that needs to be approved by the government to be implemented. This exhibits a strong commitment by the government. Further pointing to the government's good will, he said that the Prime Minister has allotted 117 crores for the development of Rangpur char, utilising which a campus is being built. Mr. Matin stated that the missing links among the NGOs and GOs should be identified and addressed for better coordination and management of the projects.

Special guest, **Fazle Hossain Badsha, MP**, said that the convention is a big step forward for the development of char. He said that the development interventions should be specific to individual districts, as one solution will not work for all. Government has taken big steps to address extreme poverty with 99 social safety net programmes worked on in the last parliament and 145 programmes being developed in the current one. Mr. Badsha said that projects should be taken to increase facilities and reduce discrimination. Terming chars as a region of endless possibility, he said that the government should utilise the potential of the char to ensure food security. The dominance of the illegal land grabbers cursed the lives of the char dwellers. He proposed for a policy where the impoverished char people are prioritised in leasing the char lands.

The chief guest of the session, **Md. Mokbul Hossain, MP**, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh that the ownership of the char land is the source of major discontent in chars. The securities of the impoverished char people are often threatened



Md. Mokbul Hossain, MP, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Agriculture sharing his experience regarding char and its development.



Fazle Hossain Badsha, MP along with the distinguished guests during the session

by the local bandits who come in boats and take away their hard earned resources. He said that the researchers on char will be more effective if they are coordinated with the government. Mr. Hossain called for a legal framework where the government, NGOs and local representatives will work together. He also emphasised on agriculture research and technology, high quality seed, fertilizers and irrigation for the development of char.

e. Open Floor Discussions

In the lively discussion, **Amin Hossain Bapari**, chairman of Patgacha Union of Kurigram said that some of the surfaced land goes under water after only two to three years, thus making a livelihood very difficult. Arranging for a proper price in the market for the impoverished char people will be helpful for the small farmers. One of the speakers said that agricultural land is decreasing annually while the population is increasing. Thus, two-story agriculture practice can be a solution to the problem. **Hamida Begum**, char dweller demanded for ensuring the security of the char people. Another char dweller called for

a board dedicated to the development of char. Other participants pointed to the necessity of appropriate weather forecasting, insurance for the crop, and development of flood tolerant crops.



Anowarul Haq, Director, Extreme Poverty, CARE, was the moderator of the session

f. Chairperson's Concluding Remarks

The Chairperson of the session, **Professor Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain**, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Open University, in his concluding speech said that he had personally noted the recommendations from the presentations and the char dwellers, and had handed them over to the moderator. He found that the presentations highlighted the successful practices and intervention while the opinion shared by the char people showed the still existing gaps. Thus, there is a necessity for the synchronisation of the actors and the people to effectively solve the problems. He opined that given the attention drawn by the convention and the presence of the policy makers in the session, positive outcomes will be elicited for the char people.

Technical Session 4

NATIONAL POLICY AND STRATEGY

a. Introduction:

The Technical Session 4, titled National Policy and Strategy was held at the Auditorium of Krishibid Institution Bangladesh. The session was moderated by **Dr. Md. Khairul Islam**, Country Director, WaterAid Bangladesh and Vice Chairman, 1st Char Convention National Committee. The session was well participated by the representatives from the government, civil society organisations and char population.

b. Guests' Introduction:

Dr. Md. Khairul Islam started the session by introducing the honorable guests and paper presenters of the panel that included:

Chief Guest: Dr. Abdur Razzak, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Parliament and Former Minister for Ministry of Food and Disaster Management

Keynote Presenter: Saifuddin Ahmed, Advocacy Manager, CARE Bangladesh

Keynote Presenter: Zahid Rahman, Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay

Designated Discussant: Dr. Mohammad Abu Eusuf, Professor, Department of Development Studies and Director of Centre of Budget and Policy, University of Dhaka.



Saifuddin Ahmed of CARE Bangladesh delivering his keynote presentation

c. Keynote Presentation:

'Towards an Inclusive Social Protection Strategy in Bangladesh'- Saifuddin Ahmed, Advocacy Manger, CARE-Bangladesh

i. Issue Synopsis:

The presentation highlighted that social security programmes have remained the predominant development agenda since the independence of Bangladesh. The progress in social development and reduction in poverty confirms the positive impacts of programmes on a range of wellbeing outcomes, from increased income and consumption to improved access to education and health care. The positive impacts also unleashed new challenges in the realm of social protection. This study on Social Safety Net, conducted in the northern riverine chars, coastal belt and haor belt, explored the comprehensive portfolio of both food- and cash-based social safety net programmes operating in the country.

ii. Study Findings:

The study showed that the current allocation for social security programmes has stabilised to around 2 percent of GDP. The current social security system is complex due to comprising a large number of programmes and management by many ministries. Furthermore, 55 out of 95 programmes have annual budget of less than Tk. 500 m. i.e. only 4% of total social security spending. Furthermore, the prevalence of institutional failures underwritten by the current political settlement is a commonly observed circumstance. This is characterised by a state with governance deficits and limited access and order for the delivery of services to its citizens. The constitutional pledge of the government is to provide a decent living to its people. The government has taken several initiatives and there has been certain level of progress. The Government of Bangladesh has embarked upon the formulation of a comprehensive National Social Protection Strategy (NSPS) that streamlines and strengthens the existing safety net programmes with a view to achieving better result, and to broaden the scope of social protection from the more narrow safety net concept to include employment policies and social insurance to address the emerging needs of a middle income country by 2021 and forward. The presentation intended that a "radical re-thinking" of social protection should not be the aim, rather current challenges which the social protection sector faces requires a new approach or vision to social protection, which builds on existing platforms, is urgently needed in order to improve the effectiveness of social protection to tackle poverty and vulnerability in Bangladesh now, and in the future.

iii. Recommendations:

The presentation recommended for the reforming of the social security system for improving functionality of the social security programmes. With this view, the implementing institutions need to be strengthened to deliver the social security programmes predictably and at scale. Clustering programmes to avoid overlapping and coherent operations of the programmes are also necessary. In order to reach the most vulnerable effectively, resources have to be allocated to according to geographical vulnerability. Furthermore, reducing risks and vulnerabilities from climate change, environmental degradation and disaster preparedness has to be prioritised. Reaching out to the socially excluded population and inclusion of poor and extremely poor in the delivery process of the programmes are also important.

Keynote Presentation

**“Employment Generation in Island Chars: Challenges & Opportunities Perspective”-
Zahid Rahman, Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay**

i) Issue Synopsis:

The objective of the presentation was to identify the major obstacles of employment generation in island char and give emphasis to the possibilities of employment generation in char areas. The study was based on a survey on 700 households of 10 island chars of 10 upazillas. It also included 10 FGDs and KILs. It highlighted that due to the isolated from the mainland areas, the char people have very limited access to government services and non-government opportunities which negatively affect the growth of productive activities and income generating initiatives. Most of the char inhabitants are deprived of getting minimum level of education and vocational training which lead them to poor development of employment capacity and technical skill. Seldom initiatives for capacity development of char people have been taken by the development organisations, private sectors, entrepreneurs and local riches, in view of enhancing the opportunity of employment. Consequently, they mostly resort to manual labor as day laborer, rickshaw/van puller, brickfield worker, farmer, fisherman and livestock and poultry farming.

ii. Study Findings:

The study found agricultural labor as the major mode of occupation for the char dwellers. 94.7% of the HHs did not receive any benefits from the SSNPs, while 56.5% HHs did not get any employment supports from the NGOs. Among the skill development training arranged by the NGOs, 55.7% were related to livestock or poultry rearing. The majority identified river erosion and poor communication system as the main obstacles in employment generation. Lack of economic resources, natural calamities, and lack of electricity were also among the identified reasons. The study found that around 75.7% char dwellers migrate to other areas to seek employment opportunities, where they work as rickshaw/van



Zahid Rahman of Unnayan Shamannay presenting at the session

puller, hawker, day laborer to earn up to Tk. 200-300 daily. In the 40 day employment programme, political affiliation, manipulation, corruption and bribe take precedence. Under the study area, only three people received opportunities under 40 Days EGP in the Chengrar char of Lalmonirhat and 16 people in Kalikapur char of Kaligonj. NGOs scarcely provide loan with the people having little capacity to repay the loan.

iii. Recommendations:

The grassroots level people from the char requested for government assistance in establishing custom-designed and handloom products to alleviate their condition. Promoting livestock farming, small industries, and homestead gardening activities at large scale at char areas to engage the char women and girls in income earning activities can have great benefits. Furthermore, training opportunities for small and cottage industries, handicrafts, and handloom products were recommended by the people. Engagement of the private sector actors in employment generation can create substantial scope within char areas. Establishment of market and seasonal krishi market, as well as cooperative market by LGED was also recommended. Additionally, increased allocation, introduction of specific quota system and prioritising the char dwellers in employment generation initiatives under social safety net programmes can be crucial in employment generation in char. Given the condition of the extreme poverty pocket, the poor workless people of island chars can be prioritised in overseas employment.

d. Discussions

Designated discussant **Dr. Mohammad Abu Eusuf** started his speech by commending Bangladesh on its GDP growth rate of 6%. Yet at the same time, he reminded that this growth rate will mean nothing if poverty and hunger are not eradicated. Dr. Eusuf pointed out to the necessity of the growth to be at all levels, rather than being confined to the macro level. He estimated that 60%-70% char dwellers were living below the poverty line. There is also a lack of book keeping and record of the amount of government allowance sent to the char areas. In order to remain above the poverty line, an adult needs



A participant from Char talking about her rights in National Policy and Strategy session

a calorie intake of 2100. In the char areas, it is estimated that one has to earn at least Tk. 6000 to satisfy this need, which a char dweller can find hard to afford.

Dr. Eusuf opined that the budgetary allocation for the healthcare sector needs a major intervention. He recommended for establishing a follow-up system for education and employment that would potentially eradicate poverty. Furthermore, “collateral free loan” scheme can be introduced for the char dwellers. Finally, he recommended that the policy makers pay special attention to the char people for the eradication of poverty from the country.

The chief guest of the session, **Dr. Abdur Razzak, MP**, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Parliament and former Minister, Ministry of food and Disaster Management assured the participants that the government is aware of the situation in the chars. As a minister, he had traveled extensively in the char areas, and witnessed the suffering of the char people. Geographical isolation, adverse environment, lac of employment opportunities and purchasing power trap them in the cycle of poverty. The extreme poor erect their houses in the emerging chars, only to be devastated by calamities such as Cyclone Aila. Dr. Razzak recalled his experience of meeting an elderly woman while distributing relief in a disaster stricken area of char. She asked him the point behind distributing a few kilograms of rice as relief as it was only going to sustain her family for a few days. After it was over, she would be back to square one. Therefore she suggested that next time, instead of giving out rice they should give out poison. This will bring them the ultimate relief.

He also pointed out that the government has brought down the poverty level to 24%, while the extreme poverty rate is 11%, a significant decrease. One day’s work can afford a person eight to ten kgs of rice. In the last five years, there have been no reports of death due to Monga. He stated that in a Kurigram union, the government had allotted eight crore taka for employment generation in the lean period. In addition to the government’s good will, he credited the resilience of people for good performance in poverty alleviation. Dr. Razzak recommended that the donors and NGOs should focus on increasing productivity for employment generation. Additionally, the government should work to create market access for the poor. Terming agriculture the key to development, he said that NGO effort, in combination with government cooperation can go a long way for development. Finally, he reaffirmed the government and his commitment to work for the development of the char areas and reach the status of mid-income country by 2021.

e. Open Floor Discussion:

Md. Johiruddin, a Union Parishad member of Begumganj union, Ulipur upazila, Kurigram pointed out to the lack of old age and maternity allowances for the people in his region. He said that only three to four such provisions has been given in the past four years. Additionally, the people did not know where to place their demand for it. In training for employment generation, the trainer often came late from the upazila. Despite gathering for training, the trainer disregarded the people and simply signed for attendance without any service delivery. Another participant from the char of Bagha thana of Rajshahi said that in the government allocates the same amount of fund to the char as the mainland area in his region without taking the conditions of char into account. He also demanded that special quotas should be created for the char people when sending Bangladeshis abroad for employment. A participant from

Bauphal upazila of Patuakhali said Aila had killed more than 200 people in his region. Although the government had allocated resources, it was insufficient. He demanded for a dam in his region to help the development of agriculture.

Mosammat Hazera Khatun, a char dweller, said that the actual 'ultra-poor' people in fact don't receive the government allowance. She requested to ensure that the said allowance reaches the target it is meant for, not the higher officials who are appointed to disburse the allowance. Another female participant from char said that women can barely work in the Char areas. This is because there is no scope for work for them. Therefore in order to generate employment for women, she recommended for 'interest free loan" scheme to be introduced.

f. Chairperson's Concluding Remarks

Dr. Md. Khairul Islam concluded the session by thanking the participants, especially the female participants and speakers for asserting their demands boldly. Finally, he requested to Dr. Razzak to personally pressurise the finance ministry to ensure the continued allocation and proper utilisation of the 50 crore allocated budget for char.



Designated discussant Dr. Mohammad Abu Eusuf of University of Dhaka speaking at the session

Technical Session 5:

CLIMATE CHANGE AND DISASTER MANAGEMENT

a. Introduction:

The fifth session of the convention, Climate Change and Disaster Management, was held from 2.30 pm to 4.15 pm at the 3D Hall of the Krishibid Institution Bangladesh. **Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad**, Director (Honorary) and Chairman, Governing Council, Dhaka School of Economics and Chairman, PKSF was the moderator and chairperson of the session.

b. Guests' Introduction:

Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad started the proceedings of the session by welcoming everyone to the pertinent session and introducing the esteemed guests and the keynote paper presenters. They were:

Chief Guest: Dr Muhammad Hasan Mahmud, MP, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on ministry of Environment and forest, Bangladesh Parliament and Former Minister, Ministry for Environment and Forest.

Designated Discussant: AKM Mamunur Rashid, Climate Change Specialist, UNDP

Designated Discussant: Matthew Pritchard, Team Leader, CLP

Keynote Presenter: Arif Abdullah Khan, Programme Manager, WaterAid Bangladesh

Keynote Presenter: Palash Mondal, Interim Coordinator – DRR/CCA and Team Leader – Building Resilience of Urban Poor Project, CARE Bangladesh

Keynote Presenter: Md Maksudul Hannan, Unit Manager, Innovation Monitoring Learning and Communications Division, CLP

c. Keynote Presentations:

“Assessment of WatSan vulnerability on the climate change impacted ‘hotspots’” -Arif Abdullah Khan, Programme Manager, WaterAid Bangladesh

i. Issue Synopsis:

The study focused on potential impact of climate change on the availability of fresh drinking water. Bangladesh has a target to reduce the number of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation in compliance with the MGD target set for safe drinking water and sanitation. But the reality is that Bangladesh is still lagging behind to achieve the set target of MDG.

With this backdrop, this study evaluates the impact of climatic hazards like monsoon floods, cyclone-induced storm surges, water stress (due to rainfall scarcity in the dry season), salinity intrusion and riverbank erosion on safe water and sanitation. This WatSan assessment also includes the factors like the socio-economic vulnerability of certain social groups– such as women, young dependents, the elderly and the unprivileged. To get an upazila-wise risk assessment and suitable technological adaptation option the study divided whole Bangladesh into five regions: North West, North Central, Extended North East, Extended Coastal Zone and Eastern Hills.

ii. Study Findings

Findings of the study portrayed that the threats of natural hazards like flood, storm surge, salinity intrusion in surface water and river erosion will increase in the future due to climate change. Additionally, the scarcity of safe water due to water logging during 5-6 months in some years, lowering of ground water level during dry season affecting the availability of groundwater from shallow tube wells and increasing rates of pollution of water bodies were found to be major threats. This assessment also addressed challenges in sanitation and hygiene as a result of natural hazards, scarcity of water in some areas for installing sanitary latrine, pollution of water bodies due to open defecation, lack of appropriate and sustainable technical solutions regarding sanitation, lack of awareness on sanitation and hygiene issues, absence of sanitation management plan and faecal sludge management. Another important finding is the very high declining rate in sunshine hour causing great concern for health and agriculture.

iii. Recommendations

This study recommends for mainstreaming Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change Adaptation (CCA) through integrated adaptation planning, policy implementation and institutional strengthening, community participation, awareness and capacity building for adaptation, women’s empowerment through active participation, technological innovation and piloting and Study and research to reduce climate change induced WASH vulnerability.

Keynote Presentation

“Rainfall, Food Security and Human Mobility: A Case Study of Bangladesh” - Polash Mondol, Interim Coordinator – DRR/CCA and Team Leader – Building Resilience of Urban Poor Project, CARE Bangladesh

i. Issue Synopsis

This paper highlighted some findings centring on the objective to understand the linkage between changing rainfall variability, shifting seasons and its impact on rural livelihoods, food security, social inequalities and different forms of human mobility. The study also focused on any potential impact of climate change on migration and displacement. At the same time, the key findings of this study brought forward some policy recommendations, useful to encounter the impact of climate change in poverty eradication and hunger.

ii. Study Findings

The result of the study showed productive activities of poor people that are directly linked with climate parameters such as rainfall. Rainfall induced hazards (i.e., drought/ aridity, untimely flood, erosion, etc.) adversely affect their production. Therefore climate change increases hardship of people's livelihood and aggravates food insecurity. To cope with such food insecurity, people sell their property, consume less or less price food, cut their expenditure and sometimes borrow cash or food. And these have further consequences. According to the study, climate change increase rain fall variability, frequency of natural hazards that eventually affect agricultural production and thus create food insecurity. In order to cope with this food insecurity, people go for seasonal out migration. Thus there is a clear link between rainfall variability, food and livelihood security and migration. The study findings reveal migration is also influenced by employment opportunity rather food insecurity only. The study also produced some of the policy recommendations like deployment of effort in improvisation of planted crop varieties, agricultural practices and introducing hazards resistant crops. Other recommendations include promotion of diversified sources of living and alternative to agriculture for the poor farmers, increasing accessibility of extreme poor household to education and social safety net programmes, social capital building and systematic investment in social development process.

iii. Recommendations

The recommendations of the study include developing of seasonal forecast/early warning systems on seasonal rainfall probability as per cropping season, designing adaptation programming for poor and marginal farmers with the changing rainfall variability, i.e. new nutrient enriched cash crops and agricultural practices to ensure food and income security, considering climate and rainfall variability in designing and implementation of special social safety-net programming (crop protection, food security, education) for the rainfall affected poverty stricken areas and national and regional analysis and cooperation on adaptation and mitigation to changing rainfall pattern.

Keynote Presentation

“Climate Change and Resilient Livelihoods: CLP’s Approach to Reducing the Vulnerability of the Extreme Poor in the Riverine Islands of North-West Bangladesh”
-Md. Maksudul Hannan, Unit Manager, Innovation Monitoring Learning and Communications (IMLC) Division, Chars Livelihoods Programme (CLP)

i. Issue Synopsis:

This paper sheds light on CLP's adapted measures to address the vulnerabilities of the extreme poor in char areas. The presentation articulated that physical vulnerabilities such as flooding and erosion, and economic vulnerabilities such as limited livelihood options, heavy dependence on wage labor, and poor access to markets as the major barriers for improving the livelihood of the people of char. Furthermore, limited access to government and NGOs services contribute to their vulnerability. At the same time, they have to constantly cope with the adverse effects of climate change due to floods, rainfall and frequent erosions among others. This results in loss of assets, negative impact on agricultural production and increase in the price of food.

ii. Study Findings:

To address the challenges, the Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP) works with extreme poor households living on island chars in north western Bangladesh with the aim to improve the livelihoods of over one million people. The key interventions of CLP include providing livelihoods options through asset transfer, reducing vulnerability to floods and providing water, sanitation and hygiene. The programme also supports in health and nutrition, influencing social norms and enabling markets for the poor.

CLP has found that its approach in reducing the physical vulnerability through raised plinths for participants have been adapted by 80% of the participants. The study found less than 4% of households experienced flooding after receiving CLP support, compared to over 97% before. It found that with CLP's support, access to clean water has increased from 5% to 70%, while access to sanitation has increased from 7% to 80%. CLP effectively reduced economic vulnerabilities by raising average income from Tk 18.62 to Tk 43 per day, average cash savings from Tk 52.18 to Tk 3,946.34 and productive assets from Tk 1,686 to Tk 52,328. CLP's comprehensive approach has also diversified sources of income, increased agricultural production and improved food security of the people.

iii. Recommendations:

This evidence suggests that the CLP's model is potentially replicable to other communities that face similar climate change-related vulnerabilities. The presentation recommended involvement of government to provide basic services such as education and health to bring sustainable change to the lives of the impoverished char people. Furthermore, improving market linkage and behavior change with attention to women's empowerment are integral components to alleviate poverty in char.

d. Discussions:

Following up on the presentations, **Mamunur Rashid**, Climate Change Specialist, UNDP said that despite the many challenges, the poor still live in chars without the livelihood facilities because they have no other options due to lack of resources. Char areas are vulnerable to climate change related disasters such as flood, drought, river bank erosion. These calamities are predicted to increase further in the future. Particularly, in the coastal char areas, there is no suitable water to drink. Saline water intrusion makes the situation worse for the dwellers. Mr. Rashid suggested that provisions for development of char can be divided into water and sanitation, economic activities and shelter. The government should pay attention to bring electricity, health and education facilities for char people. Though there are many natural obstacles in improving the livelihood in char areas, he asserted that measures must be taken to ensure the sustainable development of char people.

In his speech, **Matthew Pritchard**, Team Leader, CLP said that climate change should not be treated as a separate issue but as an integrated component that affects health services, education, infrastructure, agriculture, and capacity building, among others. Climate change adaptation should be integrated in all aspects of government development planning. Rather than a singular approach led by one stakeholder, involvement of multiple stakeholders including the government and the non-government sector is necessary to take the solutions forward. He opined that CLP's work can be seen as a template for

development. The CLP model involves inclusion of the private sector, market access facilities, and governmental and nongovernmental organisations for the development of the communities in a climate change vulnerable area.



Matthew Pritchard of CLP addressing the participants of the session

Mr. Pritchard said that in seeking solutions for climate change induced problems such as river erosion, it is important to consider whether big infrastructures such as dredging, dams, building banks and embankments are the most appropriate. Less expensive agriculture techniques in developing drought and flood resistant seeds can have considerable benefits. He said that experience shows that increasing income of the people causes the increase of adaptation. Finally, he found it inspiring to see the char people attending the convention and talking directly to the experts and policy makers.

Dr. Muhammad Hasan Mahmud, MP, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Environment and Forest, Bangladesh Parliament and Former Minister, Ministry for Environment and Forest, said that he was happy to see this initiative of the char convention where people from all stages including the char people themselves are present. Dr. Mahmud identified health, sanitation and drinking water as the major challenges of the of the char people. Due to the climate change and the consequent rise of the global temperature, chars are among the worst affected.

He said that Bangladesh has faced frequent natural disasters including massive storm surge in 1979, huge flood in 1988 and 1998. But the frequency of disasters has increased in the past years, as we faced major cyclones like Sidr and Aila. However, people's disaster management capacity and awareness has increased. The challenge is that 93% of Bangladesh's river water comes from the upstream out of the country. This makes the water resource management difficult. Dr. Mahmud said that the government has mainstreamed climate change and environmental protection in its policies. 'Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan' has been developed in coordination of multiple stakeholders. He also opined that it is time to revise it in accordance to the present conditions.



*Dr. Muhammad Hasan Mahmud, MP, Honourable Chairman
Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Environment and Forest
Bangladesh Parliament delivering his speech as the Chief Guest*

Open Floor Discussions:

In the open floor session, the participants highlighted the effect of climate change in their lives and expressed their demands. **Mamtuz Begum** of Kurigram stated that the people are now observing the effects of climate change. However, they are ill equipped to handle its negative effects. She requested for research to introduce a flood resilient rice variety. A female participant said that river erosion and regular flooding pose severe challenges in their lives. She requested for adequate support and preventive measures from the stakeholders. Another participant said that she house was affected by flooding seven times, and was forced to live on boats. She pointed out to the necessity of electricity in the chars.

Md. Shankar Ali of Panchgachia union of Kurigram narrated his experience of finding two snakes on his bed during flooding. Furthermore, the environment induced transitory nature of living made it difficult for his children to attend school. **Musammad Sadia Begum** of Bhupur, Tangail pointed out to the success of CLP's interventions such as elevated houses, improved sanitation facilities and safe drinking water improved her live substantially. She also pointed out to the necessity of a hospital in her region. **Zahidul Islam** of Gabsara union of Tangail said that 60% of the houses are drowned during the rainy season every year, as such until a dam is built, the situation will not improve.

e. Chairperson's Concluding Remarks:

Dr. Qazi Kholiqzaman Ahmad pointed out that the country has been able to bring down extreme poverty level to 11%, however the remaining percentage is a very tough group to reach. Government and non-government organisations needs to come together to formulate policies for the marginalised communities. While many programmes aim to increase the income of the people, but a multidimensional

approach people centric approach such as CLP is required. He also said that the perception of the service providers have to be changed to think that they work for the people rather than they work with the people.

Dr. Ahmad said that the government has formulated comprehensive policies for development including the Perspective Plan and the Sixth Five Year Plan; however they need to be implemented properly. Climate change adaptation has to be part of the development process to the country. The integration and collaboration among the government and NGOs actors are required as well.

He enthused that currently we are observing a vitalisation of women in the country. The vocal and lively participation of the women in the session also exemplify it. He called for embodying the spirit of the liberation war for everyone to develop ownership of the country. This way we can have a shared goal as a nation to progress forward.



A char dweller eloquently presents her case to the guests and policy makers

Technical Session 6

HUMAN RIGHTS AND GOVERNANCE

a. Introduction:

The sixth and final technical session of the convention, held on the Basement Cafeteria of Krishibid Institute Bangladesh, was on 'Human Rights and Governance' in relation to the chars. Two keynote papers were presented in the session. An open and interactive discussion took place following the presentations where the policy makers, representatives of the civil society organisations and the char people expressed their views.



Participation during parallel session

b. Guests' Introduction:

Mustafa Jabbar, President, Bangladesh Computer Samity and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee was the Chairperson and Moderator of the session. The session began with an introduction of the designated guests and discussants present in the session.

Chief Guest: Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairperson, All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Human Rights, Bangladesh National Parliament, and Former Minister for Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Special Guest: Prof. Dalem Chandra Barman, Vice Chancellor, ASA University Bangladesh (ASAUB)

Designated Discussant: M.B. Akhter, Programme Manager, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Designated Discussant: Md. Abdus Salam, Executive Director, Gono Unnayan Kendra-GUK

Keynote Presenter: Afroz Mahal, Programme Coordinator-South, Oxfam 'A Study on Livelihood options, essential services and Social Protection Mechanism in Charland: Governance Issues and Challenges' -

Keynote Presenter: 'Public Audit on Char Khas Land using RTI'-Rezanur Rahman, In Charge, Report Cell, Nijera Kori

c. Keynote Presentations:

'Livelihoods, Essential Services & Social Protection in Char land: Governance Issue & Challenges' by Afroz Mahal, Programme Coordinator-South, Oxfam in Bangladesh

i. Issue Synopsis:

The study explored gaps and challenges of governance in relation to livelihoods options, equitable access to natural resources, essential services and social protection interventions in char areas. It is based on a cross sectional qualitative study commissioned in March 2015 in three randomly selected UPs of Rangpur, Kurigram and Nilphamari.

ii. Study Findings

The study found that tenancy (50.76%) and day labour (17.33%) were the major occupations of the respondents. The majority, 45.33% had an income range of BDT 2,100-3,000, while the women, mostly working as a day labourer, earned a lower wage. Their scope of livelihood diversification was very limited. Absence of public school in study locations, proper infrastructure and demand of child labour meant that only 35% of the boys & 33% of the girls were school going. In terms of access to health service, it was found that the vast majority (93.33%) resorted to village doctors. 97.56% of the deliveries were conducted at home, compared to the national average of 68.60%. In availing the extension services, only 10.67% had contact with Department of Agricultural Extension and 4% with Department of Livestock but none with Department of Fisheries (DoF).

Furthermore, only 8% were found to submit their application for khas land despite the presence of landless majority. Access to social safety nets depended on prior contact with local elected



Afroz Mahal of Oxfam in Bangladesh delivering her keynote presentation

representatives or elites, with only 5.26% male found to receive coverage of some form of social safety net, while no women responded reported in positive. The respondents had little participation in local governance and decision making process.

iii. Recommendations:

The study recommended for specific attention to be given to char through establishing institutional mechanism and developing specific strategies. GO-NGO joint effort should be taken to enhance knowledge and skill of char people. The participation of the people in the decision making process should be facilitated by capacity building and mobilisation. Appropriate mechanism should be in work to ensure access to services. Finally, physical infrastructures including school and day care must be built.

Keynote Presentations:

'Public Audit on Char Khas Land using RTI' -Rezanur Rahman, In Charge, Report Cell, Nijera Kori

i. Issue Synopsis:

Land reform, particularly in relation to khas land distribution, has seen very limited success in the country. Due to the apathy and lack of initiative by the administration, khas lands are being encroached by land grabbers. The number of landless people dependent on agricultural land for their lives and livelihoods are increasing at an alarming rate. The presentation portrayed the experiences of landless people in using the Right to Information (RTI) Act in ensuring their rights on khas land. Participatory research methods were used where the landless themselves designed and conducted their qualitative research work.



Rezanur Rahman of Nijera Kori during his keynote presentation

ii. Study Findings:

The study found that access to natural resources, e.g. khas land and water bodies, is integrally tied to structures of power. Obtaining information on khas land through the RTI depends on the will of those in positions of power in the char lands. As such, there is a lot of apprehension among the interviewed landless women about the effectiveness of RTI. They believe that the more the powerful people can hide information or make the process complicated, the easier it becomes for land grabbers to continue their illegal hold over the khas land. Despite the potential of RTI, the respondents said that they have not benefitted from this act in terms of their access to khas land. Even when RTI was used, the government administration refused to provide the requested information citing different excuses. Based on their experiences, the study found that rights of the landless women and men accorded by RTI and the constitution are being violated regularly. The presentation ended with questioning the ownership of the khas lands, and the prevailing condition of deprivation of deserving landless people.



A CBO leader sharing her experience during open floor discussion

d. Discussions:

M. B. Akhter, Programme Manager, Oxfam in Bangladesh said that the laws of the distribution of the khas lands should be differentiated for the char areas compared to the other regions. Also, one law will not be applicable for all the chars. Mr. Akhter added there is no khas land in Jamuna, while the northern and southern chars are different in nature. Thus district specific measurement needs to be developed. The access of the char people to the technological advancement like mobile phones has helped to improve the condition. Also, the mentality of the people has changed in regards to female education. They are now more interested in educating girls. If appropriate market mechanism could be developed, then the development of the region will be accelerated. In order to engage the char people with the mainland people, it is significant to bring them out from the char lands. Otherwise, it would be impossible for them to dream about a brighter future.

Md. Abdus Salam, Executive Director, Gono Unnayan Kendra-GUK, commenting on the presentation, said that Oxfam's research is comprehensive in its focus on the market



M. B. Akhter of Oxfam in Bangladesh sharing his experience as designated discussant at the session

mechanism. He pointed out that as the men of the northern char lands go outside for earning the livelihoods, the security of the women can be at risk. Mr. Salam saw the char people's current access to micro-credit as a positive sign. However, to attain more benefits out of the system, the high rate of interest should be minimised or the char people. Also, the crediting system could be categorised according to the areas.



M Abdus Salam sharing his experience as Designated Discussant

The balanced distribution of the social safety net programmes is very important for ensuring the equitable access of the char people.

Special guest, **Professor Dalem Chandra Barman** remarked that although the session was on human rights and governance, yet the papers did not directly address the issues. The effort of the char

people in overcoming the hurdles is commendable, but at the same time he believed that no problem can be solved without direct participation and dialogue with the char people. Prof. Dalem Chandra also emphasised on transparency and credibility. Rather than relegating the extreme poor in the char areas, initiatives need to be taken to bring them under the process of planned urbanisation. As fellow human beings, all have significant role to play to alleviate the impoverished condition of the char people.



Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairperson, All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Human Rights, Bangladesh Parliament mentioned in her concluding remark that she considers herself liable for listen to the demands of the people of the 13 char areas in under her constituency. She also pointed out to the lack of representatives from the Meghna char in the session. She opined that the government does not have the level of flexibility that NGOs have in terms of

Dr. Dipu Moni, Chairperson, Parliamentary Standing Committee of Foreign Affairs addressing the participants of the session

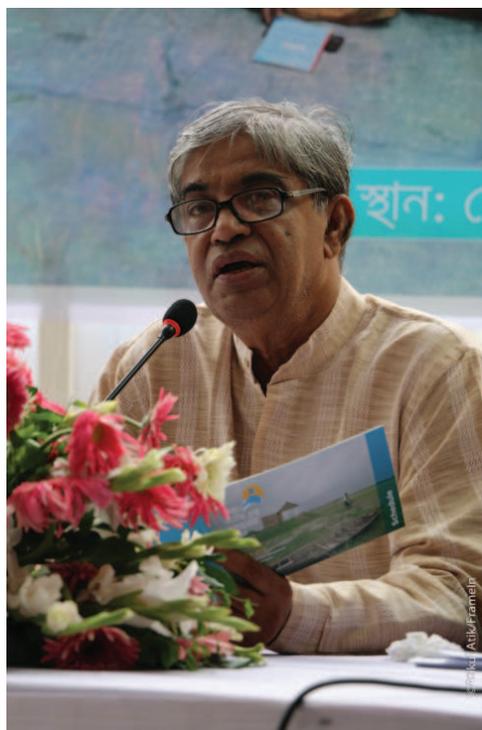
performing activities. She emphasised on the importance of carrying out an assessment of the performance of public sectors, private sectors and NGOs in effective implementation of human rights. Pointing to the plan to establish fifteen thousand more schools across the country, Dr. Dipu Moni said that the government has a positive attitude in working together with all the actors and will facilitate an environment of collaborative approach. She stated that char people have improved a lot, but to make the improvement sustainable, the people themselves need to be educated to achieve their rights.

e. Open Floor Discussions:

Manik Chowdhury from Kurigram said that despite many limitations, there are many reasons for the char people to be optimistic. The convention and vibrant participation of the people are also significant steps forward. He said that individual and institutional capacity of the people has to be built in order to make the government accountable. He called for pro-poor governance system to be in place to improve the human rights condition of the people. Mr. Chowdhury also expressed his optimism that the honourable chief guest, Dr. Dipu Moni will take the matter in her account and convey the messages to the concerned authority of the government.

Mosammad Rahima from Jamalpur said that river erosion and widespread robbery as two major issues facing her life. **Shikha Akhter** from Bakshiganj upazila of Jamalpur also identified river erosion as well as lack of education opportunities among their major problems.

Sekhar Bhattacharjee of CARE Bangladesh recommended the formulation of specific policies for the individual poverty prone areas such as char and haor. He also suggested in making the policies while taking the different conditions of the mainland and remote chars into account. **Zillur Rahman** from Gaibandha opined that the concept of good governance is still alien to people. He recommended creating a publically disseminated hotline for the people to ascribe in the cases of human rights violation.



The session was moderated by Mostafa Jabbar, renowned ICT specialist and Vice Chair of National Char Convention

f. Chairperson's Concluding Remarks:

The Chairperson, **Mustafa Jabbar**, Advisor, Bangladesh Computer Samity and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee concluded the session by saying that education is the backbone of all the human beings. He believed that the provision of education is integral to enable the char people to stand on their feet. It empowers people to fight for their rights. Furthermore, he emphasised on the access to technology as a way of achieving knowledge and empowerment.

Closing Session

a. Introduction

Following the completion of all 6 technical sessions, the closing ceremony of the 1st National Char Convention 2015 was held from 4:45pm to 6pm at the Auditorium of Krishibid Institution Bangladesh through a plenary session. The session was moderated by **Md. Mozahidul Islam**, Programme Officer – Oxfam in Bangladesh, and Member of 1st Char Convention National Committee. Representatives of the government and civil society organisations were present as honourable guests.



Participants' expression reflects event's success!

b. Guests' Introduction:

Mr. Mozahidul Islam started the proceedings stating that the closing session was to feature a presentation of the convention context and summary by Mr. M. Anwar Hossain, Member Secretary and Coordinator, 1st Char Convention National Committee, and Head of Technical Unit – Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh. This was followed by the Convention Declaration covering major findings from research and parallel sessions, and a vote of thanks by Khondoker Ibrahim Khaled, Chairman, 1st Char Convention National Committee. Then, he introduced the distinguished guests attending the closing session.

Chief Guest: Syed Mohsin Ali, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare

Special Guest: Sarah Cooke, Head of DFID Bangladesh

Chairperson: Snehal V. Soneji, Country Director – Oxfam in Bangladesh, and Vice Chair – 1st Char Convention National Committee.



Md Mozahidul Islam, Member of Char Convention National Committee moderating the Closing session.

c. Discussions:

In her speech, special guest **Sarah Cooke**, Head of DFID Bangladesh, stated that the United Kingdom has had a long-standing working experience in the chars through their funding of the Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP), through which she has had the privilege of visiting the chars or river islands a number of times. She added that she was not only mesmerised by the incredible beauty of these river islands, but also by the power of resilience of the women and men living in the chars and their harsh battle to survive every day. From her numerous visits to the chars, she shared the story of a family who had to move eleven times because their land had been washed away; and yet, they were still hopeful of a better future.

She mentioned that over the last 11 years, the UK government in partnership with the Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives, has funded 2 phases of the Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP). Since 2010, the project has achieved some remarkable results which include lifting over 43,000 households out of extreme poverty, and ensuring that 248,000 char-dwellers' houses were raised on plinths that were safe from the annual floods. The project has also improved poor people's access to safe water and latrines and helped to develop markets related to dairy value chain. As the CLP-II comes to an end in 2016, there is still a huge gap in basic services in most chars even after 11 years of UK investment. Only around half of char villages are currently being covered by a community clinic. In CLP project areas, one out of five children aged 5-7 years still do not have access to formal education yet.

She mentioned the government's new National Social Security Strategy which will create a continued push to ensure eradication of extreme poverty in the 7th Five Year Plan through a particular focus on marginalised pockets of poverty. In this context, she said that the time was right for the government to develop a new deal for the Chars - a new deal that will deliver basic health and education services, and one that will unlock the economic development potential of the chars so the poor can build a prosperous

future. She called on the Government of Bangladesh to prioritise investment in the Chars and other 'pockets of extreme poverty' under the new 7th Five Year Plan and develop a Char Commission to drive this forward. She emphasised on the need for innovation and imagination to provide basic services efficiently and effectively on the chars. Other service providers have already developed innovative service delivery models, such as school boats or remote teaching. She further pointed that we need to recognize the challenges delivering services to all chars. Lastly, she said that there is an urgent need to address the extreme poor's access to land since there are few things more transformative for poor families than having access to a piece of land. Although the government has already made a commitment to provide access to khas land to poor households, but this process needs to be faster and more land should be released for this purpose.

Ms. Cooke also said that the UK government would like to continue its support for programmes that tackle extreme poverty in partnership with the Government of Bangladesh. As CLP is coming to an end in 2016, they will be looking for a different kind of partnership with government which will help build sustainable and prosperous communities in remote regions like the chars. She concluded her speech by stating her willingness to work towards extreme poverty eradication with the government, the people of the chars, and other development partners. She also said that she hopes to look back on the day of the 1st National Char Convention 2015 as an important landmark of this journey.



Sarah Cook, Head of DFID during the closing session

Convention Declaration of 38 point demand charter on behalf of Char People:

In his speech, **M. Anwar Hossain**, Member Secretary and Coordinator of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, and Head of Technical Unit of Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh, stated that the main objective of this convention is to create a groundswell of efforts channelled towards the development of the char lands. He stated that in order to do so, every organisation have been undertaking various remarkable activities such as, ensuring diversified livelihoods for the char people, raising awareness on their right to access government services, providing required support to overcome infrastructural barriers, and promoting innovation in health, education and skills development. He said that socio-economic improvements have been observed through different indicators measuring quality of life such as, decreasing child and maternal mortality, increasing health awareness, improving sanitation and hygiene practices, increasing access to education, increasing income diversity, and many others.

However, the char people still lag behind in living standards when compared to the rest of the country. Infrastructure is underdeveloped, as annual floods, river erosion, droughts and many other disasters make char people's lives extremely vulnerable. He pointed out that, the chars also lag behind in other social indicators like gender equity, women's rightful access to government services, gender awareness, social capital and the creation of skills. He also mentioned several related legislative articles in the Constitution of Bangladesh in his speech.

Making a call to work towards sustainable and equity based development, he also stated that the National Char Alliance, which has been working on fundamental development issues of the char people since 2006, had decided to uphold the char people's demands to the policy makers for bringing sustainable development to the remote mainland and island chars of Bangladesh. In his speech, he mentioned that the National Char Alliance, in collaboration with the participating organisations, had undertaken different activities such as, district-based workshops; dialogues at different levels; 17 research-based studies on priority issues related to the lives of char people such as climate change, disaster risk reduction, livelihoods, rights and good governance, land management, right to natural resources, health and education, etc.; 13 preparatory meetings with all representatives of participating organisations; and held 1 Pre-Convention general meeting with the representatives of all participating organisations prior to the 1st National Char Convention 2015. Additionally, all participating organisations had held dialogues and discussions with various Community-Based organisations (CBOs) in their working areas, and accumulated their feedback.



M. Anowar Hossain of Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh and Member Secretary and Coordinator of the 1st Char Convention National Committee reading out the 38 point demand charter

Lastly, on behalf of the char people and the organisers, he then presented the Convention Declaration of 36 points-demand charter which calls for ensuring sustainable and resilient development for the char dwellers. Furthermore, he said that this declaration will be finalised and handed over to relevant ministries of the Government immediately after the Convention.

The Convention Declaration has been finalised at the time of writing this report. It has been published on Page 295

Chief Guest, Syed Mohsin Ali, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare, Peoples' Republic of Bangladesh expressed his solidarity to the slogan of the 1st National Char Convention, **“Let the Light of Development be Spread All over the Char”**. Recognising the struggles of the char people, he said that they are truly resilient people. He mentioned that although there are many other poverty pockets in Bangladesh, but the chars are one of the most vulnerable areas as the people are challenged with frequent natural disasters. He concluded his speech by saying that the local governments need to be empowered more in order to alleviate extreme poverty in the char lands.



Syed Mohsin Ali MP, Honourable Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare delivering his speech as the Chief Guest

Chairperson **Snehal V. Soneji**, Country Director of Oxfam in Bangladesh, and Vice Chair of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, started his speech by reflecting on the



Snehal V. Soneji, Country Director of Oxfam in Bangladesh, and Vice Chair of the 1st Char Convention National Committee speaking as the Chairperson of the session

Honourable Minister of Social Welfare's. He reiterated on the need for sustainable development of char lands, and congratulated organisers for the collective effort put towards creating such a convention for the char people. He vouched for the common objective of bringing an end to the sufferings of this marginalised community. He emphasised that the declaration was a top most priority, and that it will be forwarded to the government and relevant ministry. Calling for a combined effort from the government and NGOs to bring forth sustainable improvements in the lives of char people, he shared that Oxfam in Bangladesh will provide continuous support to meet this target. Lastly, he said that the closing session of the convention should not be seen as the end, but rather as the beginning of a new venture for the Char people.

d. Chairperson's Concluding Remarks

In his concluding remarks, Chairperson of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, **Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled** expressed his appreciation to all stakeholders for making the 1st National Char Convention 2015 a success. Furthermore, he addressed that it was the char people's presence that added to the success of the convention. Saying that maintaining the momentum gained during the organisation of this convention was of utmost importance, he suggested setting up a "Char Trust" or "Char Foundation" to follow-up and carry forward the objectives of the convention. He recommended creating a synergy between the government and non-government organisations to enrich the lives of the char people. He drew the analogy of a "2+2=5 approach" to state that a collective effort was crucial for the government and NGOs to work together to meet the target of alleviating extreme poverty in the Chars. He concluded the session by a vote of thanks for everybody.



সেশন: ১

TESTIMONY OF CHAR DWELLERS





“ Currently there is no doctor in the clinic in our area. After the NGOs working there had left, we cannot avail any health care facilities. Also, the river flows right beside the clinic which puts it at risk of river erosion.”

—Mosammad Shyron Begum, Paschim Haldibari, Hatibandha upazila, Lalmonirhat

“ Why are education facilities under developed in chars? The main reason is that no teacher wants to reside there. As char is a remote region, special attention, such as subsidised house rents needs to be given to retain the teachers.”

—Haider Ali Miah, Ulipur Upazila Chairman, Kurigram



“ There is no college in our area. Without opportunities for higher education, the girls are being married off after passing standard five. College is necessary for higher education which will in turn prevent child marriage.”

—Community leader from Char



“ We want the government officers to carry out their responsibilities in our region. Doctors and teachers do not want to go there. They consider chars as unliveable. We are living here, aren't we human? ”

—Nasrin Akhter, Godagari upazila, Rajshahi

“ My demand is that land grabbers should be punished, and char land should be distributed among the land less people. ”

—Shahida Begum, Chalbanga village, Galachipa union Patuakhali District



“ We want compensation for the damage due to climate change. We do not want relief. We just want to live safely as citizens of our country. ”

—Hamida Begum





“ We have never seen any agriculture officer in our region. I have heard of them, but never saw them with my own eyes. I also earnestly request the government and NGO service providers to give us boats. This will ease our lives and help in emergency situations like transporting pregnant women to hospitals.”

— Resident of Paka Union, Chapainawabganj District

“ Whenever we try to stand on our feet, flood throws us right back on the ground. We have to relocate in every few days because we keep losing our homes to river erosion. It is very difficult to live like this, and continue to send our children to schools.”

— Md. Shukur Ali, Panchgachia union, Kurigram



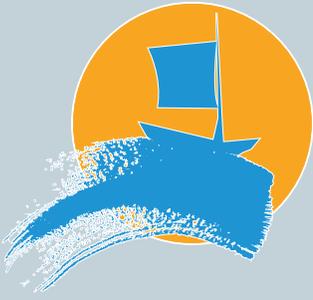
“ The government says that it will take the country to a better position within a few years. My question is whether the char dwellers are going to receive any benefit from this development. I demand for prioritisation of char dwellers in employment and creation of a special quota for overseas employment.”

— Char Dweller from Bagha union, Rajshahi



“ Brahmaputra River forces us to relocate every year. I request for the management of the river by building dams, so that 783 households of our village are saved. ”

— Shikha Akhter, Bakshiganj, Jamalpur



প্রথম
জাতীয় চর
সম্মেলন
২০১৫

1st NATIONAL CHAR
CONVENTION 2015

THE 1ST NATIONAL CHAR CONVENTION DECLARATION

“LET THE LIGHT OF DEVELOPMENT SPREAD OVER THE CHARS”

1ST NATIONAL CHAR CONVENTION 2015

6 June, 2015

Krishibid Institution Bangladesh (KIB) Complex, Dhaka

The 1st National Char Convention 2015 was organized with the slogan, “Let the light of Development spread over the Chars”. Through the convention, various local, national and international organizations which were part of the National Char Alliance had decided to uphold their demand to policy makers to bring sustainable development to the lives of char dwellers. The Convention emphasised that, agriculture, education, healthcare, communication infrastructure, income generating activities, inclusion and accessibility to government’s safety net programs, climate change, land management, and the use of ICT are imperative to ensure rights based, dignified and sustainable livelihood of char dwellers. It is the firm belief of the National Char Alliance that a collective initiative is required to ensure equitable and sustainable livelihood strategies for char dwellers. Hence, a platform like National Char Alliance is required which can identify and prioritise different issues related to development of char areas, and can present it to relevant government departments, in addition to drawing attention of relevant organizations, researchers, social workers, policy makers, and media professionals.

Despite many development efforts, char dwellers remain deprived. People living in char areas are constantly challenged by fragile infrastructure, frequent impact of natural hazards including flood, river erosion, losses of standing crops, etc. Additionally, these natural disasters are adversely affecting cultivatable and homestead land, along with livestock and other critical assets, including the savings of char dwellers. Besides, gender disparity, access to government’s services, accumulation of social capital, and availability of skilled human resources are short in char areas. This is a stark contrast to the constitution of Bangladesh, especially articles 11, 15A and 19, which state that every citizen of the country has the right to lead a dignified life, and get involved in economic activities in addition with access to basic services including food, clothing, shelter, education, and health care facilities.

To address the above-mentioned issues, the 1st National Char Convention 2015 was organized in Krishibid Institution Bangladesh (KIB) Complex, Dhaka on 6 June, 2015, which was attended by over 1,200 participants, including representatives from char areas, researchers, development actors, and civil society members, among many others. It is worth mentioning that, almost 600 participants were from char areas, and a significant portion of them were women char-dwellers. In the daylong event, members of the Parliament, ministers, and government officials of different ministries and departments including Foreign Affairs, Agriculture, Education, ICT, Health, Local Government and Cooperative, Fisheries and Livestock etc. presided as special guests and moderators in 6 parallel technical sessions. The Honourable Speaker of National Parliament presided as the Chief Guest in the opening session and expressed her solidarity to the initiative.

Based on consultations, discussions and findings of different research papers on char areas, a declaration paper was presented at the end of the convention.

In line with the constitution of Bangladesh and national and international commitments, a 14 point Declaration has been developed for the Government of Bangladesh.

Key demand for chars with regards to primary education, right based healthcare, safe access to water and sanitation facilities, impact of climate change and disaster management, land accessibility, agriculture, access to social safety net programs, employment, good governance, citizen rights, gender equality, and other issues include:

1. To establish special infrastructure, and provide supply of nutritious food and skilled human resources to ensure quality primary education for all children living in the chars. Additionally, implement ongoing development initiatives more effectively, and ensure proper physical infrastructure to continue education even during emergencies.
2. To ensure effective participation of elected representatives of char areas to guarantee quality health care facilities; make special allocations to create skilled health workers for char areas; and strengthen referral systems, communication facilities, and char dwellers' access to lifesaving drugs.
3. To create provision for link road construction, culvert, solar energy and other relevant facilities considering the remoteness and weak infrastructure and communication facilities in char areas.
4. To undertake necessary initiatives to ensure safe drinking water, sanitation and better hygiene practices in every char land, and encourage service providers to play their roles properly keeping in line with the "National Water and Sanitation Strategy Paper-2011 for the remote and backward areas".
5. To impart appropriate knowledge, skill and technology to create awareness among char dwellers on adverse impacts of climate change, promote disaster resilient livelihood strategies, rescue disaster affected population in earliest possible time, and strengthen rehabilitation work undertaken by local administration in close collaboration with local initiatives. Additionally, initiate and strengthen mobile and internet based services aimed for char-dwellers.
6. To refine land laws for mainland chars so as to ensure equal land distribution among the char people by conducting a neutral land survey through a joint commission by the government. Additionally, take adequate measures to prevent river erosion, and distribute Khas land of the chars to the genuinely poor people for permanent settlement.
7. To increase government subsidies for improved seeds, irrigation services, and agricultural equipment; set fair prices of produced goods; arrange cooperative based marketing; and ensure preservation of agricultural products through government initiatives such as cold storages.
8. To ensure regular field visits by the district, upazila and union-level agriculture officers while their activities are monitored by higher authorities.

-
9. To restructure the present social safety net programme to ensure inclusion of the truly needy people through appropriate selection processes; reform the social safety net programme and its allocations based on geographical diversity; introduce special quota schemes for the chars; and monitor changes in the lives of the beneficiaries regularly.
 10. Provide institutions support in promoting char friendly livelihood options, scaling up of tested char friendly livelihood initiatives and to prepare workforce according to global demands for employment through capacity building of capable char residents; and to raise awareness of unplanned and illegal migration through government initiatives. Strengthen the role of Youth Development Department to create self-employment opportunities and improve the quality and duration of training offered.
 11. To prioritise the women and men residing in char areas in national development planning considering the rights of extreme poor and resources available of char lands. Alongside encourage different corporate organizations to undertake CSR activities in char areas
 12. To ensure the rights of the people to increase transparency, accountability, rule of law and good governance through effective public participation.
 13. To bring gender issues into mainstream concern while making policies for the chars.
 14. To form a National Char Foundation to strengthen the development of the Char communities and formulate a char development policy.

The full version of the Declaration encompassing all 38 point demands to ensure sustainable livelihoods and dignified lives for the char people is given below:

Quality Primary Education

1. To ensure and establish infrastructure in distant chars comparable to other parts of the country to ensure quality education for all children and to ensure more effective implement of already successful initiatives;
2. To ensure appointment and engagement of skilled and educated manpower in the schools, ensure adequate supply of the educational materials, lab and logistic support to facilitate physical, psychological and social growth of the children;
3. To identify disaster prone areas and move the educational institutions to safer locations to ensure uninterrupted education during disasters;
4. To ensure supply of nutritious food for children to prevent malnutrition, add appropriate topics to the curriculum, and formulate timely policies;

Health Services and Health Rights

5. To take special measures in the health sector to ensure quality and rights-based health services in remote areas;
6. To ensure institutional health services to save the char people from unqualified or “quack” doctors; to train medical staff and involve them in health services, and to strengthen the referral system in case of critical diseases;
7. To make special allocation for health services in the chars considering their geographic position and remoteness;
8. To ensure the development of infrastructure such as connecting roads and bridges, to ease access to public health care services;
9. To ensure participation of local representatives in free distribution of life saving drugs provided by the government among the char people;

Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

10. To undertake initiatives to ensure the right of all char people to safe drinking water and sanitation; to encourage service providers to perform their duties;
11. To undertake initiatives to ensure water, sanitation and hygiene practices for char people in light of ‘National Strategy for Water and Sanitation Hard to Reach Areas of Bangladesh 2011’;
12. To allocate fair and equitable budget in water and sanitation to ensure public health of char people; to invest in disaster resilient technologies for water and sanitation appropriate in the chars;

13. To recognise demand for water and sanitation by the Upazilla level administration and to plan initiatives and implement them; to establish community clinics to improve public health of char dwellers, and to encourage both service providers and mass people to ensure water, sanitation and hygiene practices;
14. To invest in research for char-appropriate technology in association with Bangladesh University of Science and Technology (BUET); to allow access to finance at low or no interest to ensure water and sanitation services for the low-income people in the chars

Climate Change and Resilience

15. To raise awareness of the char people on climate change and its negative impacts such as heavy rainfall, drought, floods, water logging etc.;
16. To undertake all necessary measures for disaster management and post disaster rehabilitation, and to coordinate with the local administrative bodies;
17. To ensure supply of all necessary equipment and technology to improve the skills base and adaptation for a resilient livelihood

Access and Rights to Land

18. To refine the land law for the mainland to highlight char land reality and equal distribution of right to land among the char people; to conduct a separate land survey in the chars
19. To ensure security of the char producers during the harvesting season and save their crops from the influential people of the chars;
20. To undertake adequate measures to prevent river erosion, one of the major threats to the chars;
21. To distribute khas land of the chars to the poor through permanent settlement and conduct a neutral land survey in the entire chars through a joint commission;
22. To take initiatives by the concerned departments of the government to ensure access to information on land and ensure right to land according to the right to information act;

Agricultural Services

23. To initiate the production of quality seeds which are suitable for the chars in our country, and raise awareness among the farmers;
24. To increase government subsidies in improved seeds, irrigation services and agricultural equipment. Set fair prices for agricultural produce and arrange cooperative based marketing and storage of agricultural produce through government initiatives;
25. To ensure regular field visit of the District, Upazilla and Union level agriculture officers and monitor their activities; and to extend mobile and internet based services in agriculture in addition to existing services;
26. To ensure state recognition of women's labour and equal wage rates in agriculture;

Social Safety Net Programme

27. To restructure the present social safety net programme to ensure inclusion of the most needy char-dwellers;
28. To reform the social safety net programme and its allocation based on geographic diversity;
29. To monitor the positive changes of the beneficiaries regularly;

Access to Employment

30. To mobilise institutional sponsors for creating employment opportunities e.g. poultry farms, that are appropriate for the chars; to extend all currently implemented governmental and non-governmental employment programmes to create more employment
31. To prepare the char workforce according to global demand for employment through capacity building of the capable char people
32. To broaden the activities of the National Youth Development Directorate and increase the standard and duration of training for capacity building and self-employment of capable men and women;
33. To prioritise poor and socially marginalised men and women in the present programmes of different directorates of the government and relax the selection criteria if necessary;

Good Governance, Civil Rights and Gender

34. To mainstream gender issues in policies for the chars;
35. To run campaigns by the government to raise awareness on illegal and unplanned migration;
36. To raise awareness on people's entitlement to public services and take initiatives to make positive changes in attitudes of public officials according to the right to information act;

Others

37. To build special infrastructure in the chars through which greater use of solar energy/ windmills as an alternative can be ensured
38. To form a National Char Foundation to strengthen the development of the char people and formulate a char development policy;



PHOTO GALLERY



INAUGURATION



The Convention proceeding in full swing



The front row in the inaugural session



The convention generated great interest of the national print and electronic media



Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chowdhury, Honorable Speaker, Bangladesh National Parliament expressing her solidarity with the char people as the Chief Guest

Char representative Jahanara Begum handing over honorary crest to Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, Honorable Speaker, Bangladesh National Parliament



Dr. Ibrahim Khaled, Chairperson of National Char Alliance and Char Convention National Committee sharing the convention's overall purpose

Session-1



Rasheda K. Chowdhury, Executive Director of Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) and Former Advisor of Caretaker Government while speaking at the Human Capital (Health and Education) session as Special Guest.

A Char participant talking about her experience at their Human Capital (Health and Education) session



Runa Khan, Executive Director of Friendship moderating the Human Capital (Health and Education) session

Session-2



Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convetion National Committee moderating the Access to and Control Over Resources session

Audience at the Access to and Control over Resources session



Hemayet Uddin, Project Manager, Land Rights Programme, Speed Trust presenting research findings at the Access to and Control over Resources session

Session-3



A section of participants during the Agriculture and Livelihood session

Keynote speaker Shah Muntamin Mujtaba, Oxfam in Bangladesh



An audience member expressing his opinion during the session

Session-4



Chief guest Dr. Abdur Razzak, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Parliament and Former Minister for Ministry of Food and Disaster while speaking at National Policy and Strategy session.

Chairperson and moderator of the session National Policy and Strategy Dr. Md. Khairul Islam, Country Director, WaterAid Bangladesh.



Saifuddin Ahmed, Advocacy Manger, CARE Bangladesh is delivering his keynote presentation in the National Policy and Strategy session

Session-5



A participant from Char greets the session's Chief Guest, Dr. Muhammad Hasan Mahmud, MP

Chairperson of the session, Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, addressing the questions from the participants.



Palash Mondal of CARE Bangladesh presenting a paper on the Climate Change and Disaster Management session

Session-6



A segment of the participants during the session 'Human Rights and Governance'

Rezanur Rahman, In Charge, Report Cell, Nijera Kori delivering his keynote presentation in the session



Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, Honourable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairperson, All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Human Rights, Bangladesh Parliament addressing the participants as the chief guest

Closing Session



Syed Mohsin Ali MP, Honorable Minister, Ministry of Social Welfare speaking as the chief guest of the closing session

Mr. Snehal V Soneji, Country Director, Oxfam in Bangladesh and Vice Chair of Char Convention National Committee delivered the concluding remarks



Audience response during the closing session

Cultural Event





NEWS COVERAGE



NEWS CLIPPINGS OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE



আলোয় আনিতে হইবে চরাঞ্চলকেও

নীতিগতন কিংবা নানাবিধ কারণে ব্যাহত অসুস্থ যখন নীরব হুকে আঁগিয়া তাঁরা হয়ে একত্বেরে অধিক আগ্রহ বুঝিয়া গরু কোম্বারবে বিক্রির কথা, তখন যথেষ্টে তাহাদের গুরু হয় এক নির্দিষ্ট লিঙ্গের মীমাংসা। কোম্বারবে বিক্রি কারবার সেই সময়েই চলে আসিত। শ্রীমাতৃক দেশে এই একত্বেরে অসুস্থ সংস্থা বিশৃঙ্খল, ব্যবস্থাকাল অধ্যায়েরে ৯০ শতকধিক। বোর্ড জলপায়েরে বিদ্যায় অচ্যুত গায় চার শতকধিক অধিক।

একটি গবেষণা প্রতিবেদন হইতে জানা যায়, চরাঞ্চলে যেখানে রকম যাক না করা মানুষের ঘরে ঘরে চরবাসীরা ১০ মাসিক ৭ শতাংশ। কিন্তু সময়েই হইবে পরিমাণ ৯ শতাংশ। যদিও চরবাসী হইতে অব, কালদেরে মানুষেরে পার্থক্য হইল, হরেরে মানুষ অল্প কাল অল্পকৈ ভাপ করিয়া করিতে বাধ্য হয়। এগালার মানুষ যোগাযোগে সক্ষম্য করেণে ফল উৎপাদন করিয়াও খারাপক্রীত করিতে পারি ন। যাবেরে কথা থাকলে কম নামেরে পণ্য বিক্রিরে চরবাসীরে মানুষ অধিক দমে কম করিতে বাধ্য হয়।



Govt, non-govt synergy a must

Speakers tell daylong 1st National Char Convention 2015



Speaker for forming national body to plan improvement of char people

Jayya Sangsad Speaker Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhary Saturday called for forming a national committee with Members of Parliament of concerned constituencies to adopt and implement plans for improving the lot of people living in char areas.

"We want inclusive development plans, from which any particular class or region is not excluded," she said, speaking at the inaugural session of first national char conference at Kribhadi Institute in the city.

The speaker urged the members of parliament to work together to ensure overall development in char areas by including the needs of those areas in the government's national development plan.



ধনী-দরিদ্রের বৈষম্য কমাতে হবে

৪ বছরের রাষ্ট্রপতির কাঙ্ক্ষিত স্বপ্নের পিছনে ৩ দিনের পত্রিকা প্রকাশের বিরোধিতা করা হয়েছে।



Speaker anticipates end to char people's plight

Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhary anticipates that the plight of Bangladesh's "char people", an inhabitants of the country's network of low-lying small islands are known, could be removed by 2030, she says.

"The Finance Minister in his budget speech has mentioned that extreme poverty will be removed from the country by 2030 and I expect that livelihoods of char people would be improved within that timeframe," she said at the inaugural session of the country's first char convention on Saturday.

About 30 NGOs and development partners, including Department for International Development (DFID), Concern Worldwide, Dufay, Care Bangladesh, WaterAid, Maitree Janya Foundation, Ishtar Relief, International High Commission, Centre for Natural Resource Studies (CNRS), Gono Shikshaketa Ojona and Umanon Shikshaketa jointly organised the National Char Convention 2015 at Kribhadi Institute Bangladesh (KIB) in the capital.

Speaking at the chief guest, Shirin Sharmin Chaudhary said the government is carrying out all its development activities with a view towards poverty eradication.

"The government is going ahead with its plans to remove inclusive development, the poverty rate has already come down to 23.5 percent from 46 percent," she added.

The speaker said the country's constitution suggests taking special initiatives to bring the people still lagging behind into mainstream and the char people are such a group.

She said the government has already taken steps to reclaim 20,000 acres of land from the sea to re-allocate the landless people.

About 10 lakh poor people are currently living in the char areas across the country. Apart from land to reach communication facilities, the people are also deprived of many fundamental rights and employment opportunities.

Speaking on the occasion, Char Convention committee chairperson and chairman economist Khondakar Ibrahim Elshad urged the government to form a national committee, involving representatives from both NGOs and its ministries, to find ways to develop the livelihoods of char people.



Jayya Sangsad Speaker Shirin Sharmin Chaudhary addressed the inaugural session of the daylong 1st National Char Convention 2015, themed "Let there be light" and organised by over 40 national and international non-government organisations, in the capital's Kribhadi Institute Bangladesh yesterday.

NEWS CLIPPINGS OF THE PRESS CONFERENCE



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ঢাকা, ৭ জুন ২০১৫ | ২৪ জ্যৈষ্ঠ ১৪২২ | ১৯ শাব্দিক ১৪৩৬ | বর্ষ ৬ | সংখ্যা ১৪৬

প্রথম জাতীয় চর
সংমেলনে শি্পকার
দারিদ্র্য দূর করতে



দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণে সমন্বিত পরিকল্পনা
শি্পকার প্রতিবেদক

জাতীয় চর সংমেলনে শি্পকার দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণে সমন্বিত পরিকল্পনা প্রস্তাব করেছেন।



জাতীয় চর সংমেলনে উদ্বোধন
দারিদ্র্যদের প্রতি বৈষম্য
দূর করতে পরিকল্পনা
নিতে হবে: শি্পকার



জাতীয় চর সংমেলনে শি্পকার
দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণে সমন্বিত
ধনী-দরিদ্র বৈষম্য
কমিয়ে আনতে হবে



**দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণে দরকার
সমন্বিত পরিকল্পনা**

জাতীয় চর সংমেলনে শি্পকার দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণে সমন্বিত পরিকল্পনা প্রস্তাব করেছেন।



**দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণে দরকার
সমন্বিত পরিকল্পনা**



জাতীয় চর সংমেলনে শি্পকার দারিদ্র্য দূরীকরণে সমন্বিত পরিকল্পনা প্রস্তাব করেছেন।



PROGRAMME SCHEDULE



PROGRAMME SCHEDULE

1st National Char Convention 6 June, 2015 Krishibid Institution Bangladesh Khamar Bari Road, Farmgate, Dhaka

Inaugural Session

Chief Guest:

Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, MP, Honorable Speaker, Bangladesh Parliament & Chairperson, Commonwealth Parliamentary Association

Guests of Honour

- Priya Powell, Counsellor, Head of Development Cooperation, Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)
- A.K.M. Musha, Country Director, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh & Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee
- Shishir Shil, Secretary General, All-Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), Bangladesh Parliament and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee
- Mahindra Nath Roy, Representative of Char land

Session Facilitation

M. Anowar Hossain, Member Secretary and Coordinator, 1st Char Convention National Committee and Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Chairperson

Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled, Chairman, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Crest hand over to the Chief Guest and Special Guest

Session-1

Subject: Human Capital (Health and Education)

Chief Guest:

Md. Motahar Hossain, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Primary and Mass Education, Bangladesh Parliament

Special Guests

- Rasheda K Chowdhury, Executive Director, CAMPE and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Moderator

Runa Khan, Executive Director, Friendship

Keynote Presenter

- A glimpse of education and the paths of improving quality education in isolated Chars in Bangladesh – Rama Hansraj, Assistant Country Director, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
- ‘Healthcare seeking behavior and facilities available in char areas of Bangladesh’ - Dr. Md. Khaliqzaman, Associate Professor, BSMMU

Designated Discussants

- Dr. Rashid-E-Mahbub, Former President, Bangladesh Medical Association
- M Habibur Rahman, Education Sector Advisor, Save the Children International

Chairperson: Shabel Firuz, Country Director, Islamic Relief, Bangladesh and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Session-2

Subject: Access to and Control over Resources

Chief Guest:

Md. Abdul Wadud, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Food, Bangladesh Parliament

Special Guests

- Hon. A.K.M. Zahangir Hossain, MP, Former State Minister, Ministry of Textiles and Jute
- Khushi Kabir, Coordinator, Nijera Kori

Keynote Presenter

- ‘Is land rights utterly an illusion for landless Char dwellers?’- Hemayet Uddin, Project Manager, Land Rights Programme, Speed Trust
- Water Resource Management in Coastal Belt - A. K. M. Mostafa Zaman, Professor, Department of GIS and EO, Faculty of Disaster Management, Patuakhali Science and Technology University

Designated Discussants

- Dr. Muktarun Islam, Assistant Professor, Department of Irrigation And Water Management, Sylhet Agricultural University

Moderator and Chairperson:

Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Session-3

Subject: Agriculture and Livelihood

Chief Guest:

Md. Mokbul Hossain, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Agriculture, Bangladesh Parliament

Special Guests

- Hon. Fazle Hossain Badsha, MP, Rajshahi-2, Bangladesh Parliament
- MA Matin, DG, Rural Development Academy, Bogura

Moderator

Anowarul Haque, Director- Extreme Rural Poverty, CARE-Bangladesh

Keynote Presenter

- 'Dry Chili Market in Bangladesh: Present Challenge and Opportunities' Shah Muntamin Mujtaba, Programme Coordinator, Oxfam in Bangladesh
- Resilient Livelihoods: CLP's Multi-sectorial Approach to Promoting Livelihoods and Reducing Poverty in the Chars- Dr Mahbub Alam, Livelihoods Coordinator, CLP
- 'Making Markets Work for the Chars', Fouzia Nasreen, General Manager, M4C, Swisscontact

Designated Discussants

- AKM Zakaria, Director, Agriculture Sciences Division, Rural Development Academy
- Yarun Begum, President, Golna Community Based Organisation

Chairperson:

Professor Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain, Pro-Vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Open University

Session-4

Subject: National Policy and Strategy

Chief Guest:

Dr. Abdur Razzak, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh Parliament and Former Minister for Ministry of Food and Disaster Management

Keynote Presenter

- 'Towards an Inclusive Social Protection Strategy in Bangladesh'- Saifuddin Ahmed, Advocacy Manger, CARE-Bangladesh
- 'Employment Generation in Island Chars: Challenges and Opportunities Perspective' –, Zahid Rahman, Unnayan Shamannay

Designated Discussants

Dr. Mohammad Abu Eusuf, Professor, Department of Development Studies, and Director, Centre on Budget and Policy, University of Dhaka

Chairperson & Moderator

Dr. Md. Khairul Islam, Country Director, WaterAid Bangladesh and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Session-5

Subject: Climate change and Disaster Management

Chief Guest

Dr. Muhammad Hasan Mahmud, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Environment and Forest, Bangladesh Parliament and Former Minister for Environment and Forest Ministry

Keynote Presenter

- 'Assessment of WatSan vulnerability on the climate change impacted hotspots' - Arif Abdullah Khan, Programme Manager, WaterAid Bangladesh
- Rainfall, Food Security and Human Mobility- Case Study: Bangladesh- Md. Harun or Rashid, Climate Change Coordinator, CARE Bangladesh
- Climate Change and Resilient Livelihoods: CLP's Approach to Reducing the Vulnerability of the Extreme Poor in the Riverine Islands of North-West Bangladesh - Md Maksudul Hannan, Unit Manager, Innovation Monitoring Learning and Communications (IMLC) Division

Designated Discussants

- AKM Mamunur Rashid, Climate Change Specialist, UNDP
- Matthew Pritchard, Team Leader, CLP

Chairperson

Dr. Qazi Kholiquzzaman Ahmad, Director (Honorary) and Chairman of Governing Council, Dhaka School of Economics and Chairman, PKSF

Session-6

Subject: Human Rights and Governance

Chief Guest

Dr. Dipu Moni, MP, Honorable Chairman, Parliamentary Standing Committee on Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Chairperson, All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Human Rights, Bangladesh Parliament, and Former Minister for Ministry of Foreign Affairs

Special Guests

- Prof. Dalem Chandra Barman, Vice Chancellor, ASA University Bangladesh (ASAUB)

Keynote Presenter

- 'A Study on Livelihood options, essential services and Social Protection Mechanism in Charland: Governance Issues and Challenges' - Afroz Mahal, Programme Coordinator, Oxfam in Bangladesh
- 'Public Audit on Char Khas Land using RTI'-Rezanur Rahman, In Charge, Report Cell, Nijera Kori

Designated Discussants

- M.B. Akhter, Programme Manager, Oxfam in Bangladesh
- Md. Abdus Salam, Executive Director, Gono Unnayan Kendra-GUK

Chairperson & Moderator:

Mustafa Jabbar, President, Bangladesh Computer Samity and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Chief Guest:

- Syed Mohsin Ali, Minister, Ministry of Social welfare

Special Guest

- Sarah Cooke, Head of DFID Bangladesh

Closing Session

Session Facilitator:

Mozahidul Islam, Programme Officer, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Presentation on Convention Context and Summary

M. Anwar Hossain, Member Secretary and Coordinator, 1st Char Convention National Committee and Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Convention Declaration

Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled, Chairman, 1st Char Convention National Committee

Chairperson

Snehal V. Soneji, Country Director, Oxfam in Bangladesh and Vice Chair, 1st Char Convention National Committee



প্রথম
জাতীয় চর
সম্মেলন
২০১৫
INTERNATIONAL CHSR
SYMPOSIUM 2015



১৩ জুন ২০১৫
পটভিত্তিক ইনসিটিটিউট
কালেক্টরেট, ঢাকা
স্বরাধ্বলে
সিঁড়িয়ে পড়ুক
উন্নয়নের
আলো

CONVENTION HALL
EXECUTIVE OFFICE

সম্মেলন

INTERNATIONAL CHSR
SYMPOSIUM 2015

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SYMPOSIUM 2015



PRE-CONVENTION PROCESS



Preparatory Meetings at a Glance

The 1st National Char Convention 2015 is the result of a long and extensive preparatory process that involved a total of 14 preparatory meetings. In the spirit of collaboration and collectiveness, the preparatory meetings were held at the offices of different participating organisations over the course of time. Of the 14 meetings, 6 were held at Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh; 2 were held at WaterAid Bangladesh and Unnayan Shamonnay each; while 1 was held at CARE Bangladesh, Oxfam in Bangladesh and Manusher Jonno Foundation offices each. All the meetings paved the way for the eventual successful organisation of the Convention.

The meeting at the Manusher Jonno Foundation on 8 January, 2015 had great participation with all of the organisations expressing their full support. The mode of resource mobilisation and utilisation by opening a bank account and the formation of the national committee of the convention were two of the major outcomes of the meeting.

The following preparatory was meeting held at Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh office on 19 January. The moderator of the meeting, M. Anowar Hossain, Member Secretary and Coordinator of the Convention and the Head of Technical Unit at Concern Worldwide, shared the budget and the fund commitments by participating organisations on the day. It was decided that a total of 600 participants will be brought from the char by the participating organisations. The discussion also dwelled on the study papers and the presentation finalisation.



Meeting at Concern Worldwide on 19 January, 2015

The next preparatory meeting was held at WaterAid, Bangladesh on 17 February. The well attended meetings reinvigorated the momentum for the upcoming convention with specific outcomes. The vice-chairs of the national committee were determined while the declaration preparation committee and procurement committee were formed. Among other decisions, Unnayan Shomonnay was selected as the Secretariat for the Convention.



Preparatory meeting at WaterAid on 17 February, 2015

A special meeting was held at Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh office on 11 March to reach collective decision regarding the organisation of the Convention amidst the then volatile political context of Bangladesh. The meeting was moderated by Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled, Chair of the 1st Char Convention National Committee. The participants of the high level meeting reaffirmed their commitment for the cause and expressed their determination to proceed with the preparation of the convention.

After settling the date of the convention, the last preparatory meeting was held on 2nd June, 2015. The discussion dwelled on the organisation and management of the convention proceedings on the day of the convention. Representatives of the participating organisations bore and shared their responsibilities and duties with great enthusiasm.



Special meeting at Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh on 11 March, 2015

Summary of the Events at the District and Community Level:

In preparation of the Convention, a number of consultation meetings were held at Pabna, Chapainawabganj, Rajshahi and Lalmonirhat. The Local Char Alliance members, char dwellers and stakeholders from various levels were among the participants of the meetings. The demands and recommendations of the char dwellers were articulated in the meetings to put forth in making the Char Declaration.

Summary of the Pre-convention General Meeting:

A Pre-convention general meeting was held at Chhayanaut Bhaban on 25 May, 2015. The general meeting shed light on the progress and modality of the upcoming convention for all to be on the same page. The logo of the convention was revealed, and invitation cards for the convention were also disseminated in the meeting for the organisations to distribute them all around the country. The Chairman of the 1st Char Convention National Committee, Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled; Professor Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain, Pro-vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Open University; Mustafa Jabbar, renowned ICT expert; Shabel Firuz, Country Director, Islamic Relief Bangladesh; Matthew Pritchard, Team Leader, CLP and Anowarul Haq, Director - Extreme Rural Poverty, CARE-Bangladesh were among the guests in the event.



Esteemed panelists of the Pre-Convention General meeting held on 25 May, 2015. From left, Shaheen Ul Alam, Project Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay; M. Anowar Hossain, head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh; Professor Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain, Pro vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Open University; Matthew Pritchard, Team leader, CLP; Khondoker Ibrahim Khaled, Chairman, National Char Alliance; Mostofa Jabbar, renowned ICT specialist; Shabel Firuz, Country Director, Islamic Relief, Bangladesh and Anowarul Haq, Director- Extreme Rural Poverty, CARE Bangladesh

M. Anowar Hossain, Member Secretary of 1st National Char Convention and the Head of Technical Unit of Concern Worldwide, thanked the participating organisations for their full support in bringing the convention this far. He shared the names of the working committees and the schedule of the convention. Mr. Hossain spoke about the structure and names of the confirmed participants of the convention.

Professor Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain in his speech emphasised on the spirit of collectiveness and the mentality of volunteerism as the key factors in generating a successful momentum such as the char convention. He suggested that in addition to presented papers, it is important to capture the voice of the participating char dwellers in articulating the char declaration and development planning for char.

Matthew Pritchard of Char Livelihoods Programme said that his organisation was very pleased and proud to be part of the convention. He observed that char people have great potential and with minimum assistance, they can improve their condition and defeat poverty. He hoped that the convention will bring wider attention to the challenges of char dwellers and cause the government to extend a helping hand.

Mustafa Jabbar said that his experience of working for Haor convention shows that if collective voice can be raised to the policy makers in the form of a declaration, then great benefits can be achieved. He stressed upon the importance of articulating specific and realistic demands to place in front of the state.

Anowarul Haq of CARE Bangladesh said that the direct participation of the char dwellers and the collective effort of all the participating organisations were very encouraging. He hoped that the convention will bring the char issues at the forefront of the national discourse.

Shabel Firuz of Islamic Relief Bangladesh pointed out that as a riverine country, the chars will always be present in Bangladesh. He believed that char people should not be reliant on the NGOs for their development. He expressed his confidence that the convention will start a momentum and initiate a continuous process that will result in a positive change for the impoverished char dwellers.

After the speeches, a lively discussion took place as the floor was opened for the rest of the participants to share their views and suggestions for the convention.



Participants of the Pre Convention general meeting

Summary of the Press- Conference:

A press conference was held on 27 May, 2015 at the National Press Club Conference Lounge prior to the convention in order to disseminate information on the organisation and objectives of the 1st National Char Convention 2015. Oxfam Bangladesh Country Director Snehal V Soneji, Concern Worldwide Country Director AKM Musha, Chars Livelihoods Programme Team Leader Matthew Pritchard, Manusher Jonno Foundation Executive Director Shaheen Anam, renowned information technology expert Mustafa Jabbar and Care Bangladesh Director-Extreme Poverty Anowarul Haque were present in the event. The conference was chaired by Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled, Chairman, 1st Char Convention National Committee and the chairperson the National Char Alliance.



Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled, Chairman, National Char Alliance speaking at the press conference on May 27 before the 1st National Char Convention 2015 at National Press Club Conference Lounge. From left, Anowarul Haq, Director- Extreme Rural Poverty, CARE Bangladesh; Snehal V. Soneji, Country Director, Oxfam Bangladesh; M. Anowar Hossain, Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh; A.K.M. Musha, Country Director, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh; Matthew Pritchard, Team Leader, CLP and Mustafa Jabbar, renowned ICT Expert are present on stage.

In the conference, **Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled** said that the aim of the convention was to draw the policymakers' attention in alleviating poverty of people living in chars of Bangladesh. He pointed to the necessity of highlighting the char people's plight in the media through the convention for the government to take initiatives. He also expressed his optimism that the convention will mobilise the government to develop special planning for the development of the chars.

In his speech **M. Anowar Hossain**, Coordinator and Member Secretary of 1st National Char Convention highlighted the three major objectives of the convention. In addition to the major challenges faced by the char people, he also said that char areas have great untapped potential. Citing to the Constitution of Bangladesh that calls for equal opportunities for all, he requested journalists to bring the



The news of the Convention stirred great interest among the journalists

issues of the char people to the attention of the government. He read out the demands of the char people that included ensuring a continuous budget allocation for the development of the char, creating opportunities in agriculture production, increasing the quality of governmental services including health and education, creating employment and rehabilitation of the river erosion affected people, among others.



*A.K.M. Musha, Country Director, Concern Worldwide while speaking in the press conference.
Matthew Pritchard, Team Leader, CLP is sitting beside him.*

1st Char Convention National Committee

Chairperson:

Khondokar Ibrahim Khaled, Chairman, National Char Alliance

Vice-Chairs:

A.K.M. Musha, Country Director, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Dr. Md. Khairul Islam, Country Representative, WaterAid Bangladesh

Jamie Terzi, Country Director, CARE Bangladesh

Mustafa Jabbar, Renowned ICT Expert

Prof. Khondoker Mokaddem Hossain, Pro-vice Chancellor, Bangladesh Open University

Rasheda K. Chowdhury, Executive Director, Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE)

Shabel Firuz, Country Director, Islamic Relief Bangladesh

Shabel Firuz, Country Director, Islamic Relief Bangladesh

Shaheen Anam, Executive Director, Manusher Jonno Foundation

Shisir Shil, Secretary General, APPGs- Bangladesh Parliament

Snehal V. Soneji, Country Director, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Member Secretary and Coordinator:

M. Anowar Hossain, Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh

Members:

A H M Foysoul, Media Manager, DORP

A H M Nouman, Executive Director, DORP

A.Z.M. Nazmul Islam Chowdhury, Head, Extreme Poverty Programme, Practical Action

Abul Hasib Khan, Executive Director, Resources Integration Centre

AFM Akhter Uddin, Executive Director, Uttara Development Program

Ahmed Shapan Mahmud, Executive Director, VOICE

Anowarul Haq, Director - Extreme Rural Poverty, CARE-Bangladesh

Asif Imran Khan, Advocacy Officer, Concern Worldwide

Dr. Ananya Raihan, Executive Director, D.net

Dr. M Mokhlesur Rahman, Executive Director, Centre for Natural Resource Studies

Dr. Shahana Rahman, Acting Chairperson, Unnayan Shamannay

Dr. Shamsur Nahar Khan Doli, President, Bangladesh Kishani Shova

Fouzia Nasreen, General Manager, M4C, Swisscontact

Habibullah Bahar, Director, Manab Mukti Sangstha

Hasan Ahmed Chowdhury Kiron, Chairman, Debate for Democracy

Imtiaz Sultan Johnny, Former National Footballer

Ira Rahman, Chief Coordinator, Gonochetona

Kazi Nabiul Haque, Executive Director, Resource Foundation

M. Anisul Islam, Director, CNRS

M. Mahbulul Ashraf, Executive Director, Ashraf Foundation

Mahabuba Rahman, Head of Operations, APPGs- Bangladesh Parliament

Mark Razib Halder, Executive Director, Win Bangladesh

Matthew Pritchard, Team Leader, CLP

Md. Abdul Awal, Executive Director, Credit and Development Forum (CDF)

Md. Abdul Jalil, Executive Director, Amra Kaj Kori (AKK)

Md. Abdus Salam, Chief Executive, Gono Unnoyan Kendro (GUK)

Md. Abu Tahea Talukder, Director, Gono Chetona
Md. Arifur Rahman, Poverty and Livelihood Adviser, DFID
Md. Ehsanul Hoque, Senior Programme Manager, CNRS
Md. Kamruzzaman, Coordinator-Research, Climate Change Unit, CCDB
Md. Lutfar Rahman, Executive Director, Gono Unnayan Kendra
Md. Manjur Hossain, Executive Director, BOSS
Md. Monjed Ali, Executive Director, Jamuna Samaj Kallyan Sangstha
Md. Mozahidul Islam, Program Officer, Oxfam in Bangladesh
Md. Nazrul Islam, Executive Director, Samata Nari Kallyan Sangstha
Md. Rasel Ahmed Liton, Chief Executive, SKS Foundation
Md. Shafiqul Islam, Executive Director, CEDAR
Md. Tariqul Islam, Executive Director, Grameen Bohumukhi Unnayan Sangstha (GBUS)
Mohammad Ali Hazari, Founder and CEO, United People's Trust
Muhammad Abu Taher Khan, Former MD, NGO Foundation.
Muhammad Hilaluddin, President, Angikar Bangladesh
Muhammad Maksudul Hannan, IMLC Unit Manager, CLP
Munirul Islam, Programme Manager, Islamic Relief, Bangladesh
Prodip Kumar Roy, Executive Director, Knowledge Society
Prof. H.K.S Arefeen, Anthropologist
Rama Hansraj, Assistant Country Director, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
Rehana Siddiqui, Executive Director, Rehana Siddiqui Foundation
Rev. Dr. Sukamal Biswas, Chairman, KOINONIA
Rina Roy, Director, Rights, Manusher Jonno Foundation
Robiul Alam, Executive Director, ASSEDO
Ruhul Amin Bulu, Executive Director, RFS
Runa Khan, Founder and Executive Director, Friendship
Sadia Hossain, Communications Coordinator, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
Saifuddin Ahmed, Advocacy Manger, SHOUHARDO, CARE Bangladesh
Shah Md. Anowar Kamal, Executive Director, Unnayan Shahojogy Team (UST)
Shaheen Ul Alam, Project Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay
Shahidul Islam, Executive Director, Uttaran
Shamim Ahmed, Head of Policy and Advocacy, WaterAid
Shamim Ara Begum, Executive Director, Pollisree
Sharifuzzaman Sharif, General Secretary, Nagorik Sanghati
Shashwatee Biplob Talucder, Senior Manager, DFAT, Australian High Commission
Shekhar Bhattacharje, Program Coordinator, CARE Bangladesh
Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Sr. Coordinator – Program, Manusher Jonno Foundation
Stuart Kenward, Innovation, Monitoring & Learning Director, CLP
Subal Sarkar, Bangladesh Bhumihin Samity (BBS)
Suzit Kumar Ghosh, Executive Director, Own Village Advancement
Syed Ishtiaq Reza, Head of News, Channel 71
Tanjina Noushin, CEO, Youth Forum
Taskinur Rahman, Executive Director, ASOD
Zahid Rahman, Research and Advocacy Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay
Zaman Khan, Team Leader, JOBS-IRIS Bangladesh
Zayed Iqbal Khan, Coordinator, Bangladesh Krishok Federation

1st Char Convention Sub-Committees

Declaration Preparation Committee

Coordinator of the committee:

M. Anowar Hossain, Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Members:

Anowarul Haq, Director - Extreme Rural Poverty Program, CARE Bangladesh

Mahabuba Rahman, Coordinator, APPGs Bangladesh Parliament

Md Maksudul Hannan, IMLC Unit Manager, CLP

Matthew Pritchard, Team Leader, CLP

Md. Arifur Rahman, Poverty and Livelihood Advisor, DFID

Md. Ehsanul Hoque, Senior Programme Officer, CNRS

Md. Mozahidul Islam, Program Officer, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Muhammad Hilaluddin, President, Angikar Bangladesh

Shamim Ahmed, Head of Policy, WaterAid Bangladesh

Sharifuzzaman Sharif, General Secretary, NSS

Shashwatee Biplob Talucder, Senior Program Manager, DFAT

Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Program Coordinator, Manusher Jonno Foundation

Zayed Iqbal Khan, Coordinator, Bangladesh Krishok Federation

Procurement Committee

Md. Kamruzzaman, Coordinator-Research, Climate Change Unit, CCDB

Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Programme Coordinator, Manusher Jonno Foundation

Zahid Rahman, Advocacy and Research Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay

Programme Committee

Anowarul Haq, Director - Extreme Rural Poverty, CARE Bangladesh

Asif Imran Khan, Advocacy Officer, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Fahmida Afroz, Advocacy Officer, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Firoj Ahmed, Senior Programme Officer, CNRS

Md. Kamruzzaman, Coordinator-Research, Climate Change Unit, CCDB

Md. Mozahidul Islam, Program Officer, Oxfam in Bangladesh

Muhammad Hilaluddin, President, Angikar Bangladesh

Munirul Islam, Programme Manager, Islamic Relief Bangladesh

Sadia Hossain, Communications Coordinator, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Shaheen Ul Alam, Project Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay

Shamim Ahmed, Head of Policy and Advocacy, WaterAid Bangladesh

Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Sr. Coordinator – Program, Manusher Jonno Foundation

Zayed Iqbal Khan, Coordinator, Bangladesh Krishok Federation

Publication and Publicity Committee

A H M Foysool, Media Manager, DORP

Arif Abdullah Khan, Programme Manager, WaterAid Bangladesh

Asif Imran Khan, Advocacy Officer, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh

Fahmida Afroz, Advocacy Officer, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
Habib Torikul, Program Officer, Islamic Relief Bangladesh
M. Anowar Hossain, Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
Manab Mitra Chakma, Advocacy Officer, CNRS
Muhammad Hilaluddin, President, Angikar Bangladesh
Nahid Sharmin, Research Associate, Unnayan Shamannay
Sadia Hossain, Communications Coordinator, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
Saifuddin Ahmed, Advocacy Manager, CARE
Sharifuzzaman Sharif, General Secretary, NSS
Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Sr. Coordinator – Program, Manusher Jonno Foundation
Tapash Ranjan Chokraborty, Program Officer, Oxfam in Bangladesh
Zahid Rahman, Research and Advocacy Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay

Logistics, Decoration, Stall preparation

Jahirul Islam, Program Associate, Oxfam in Bangladesh
Md. Waliul Islam, Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay
Rubel Talukder, Char Programme Coordinator, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
Saifuddin Ahmed, Advocacy Manager, CARE Bangladesh
Sharifuzzaman Sharif, General Secretary, NSS
Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Sr. Coordinator – Program, Manusher Jonno Foundation

Food Management

M. Habibur Rahman, Logistic Assistant, Unnayan Shamannay
Rubel Talukder, Char Programme Coordinator, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
Zayed Iqbal Khan, Coordinator, Bangladesh Krishok Federation

Budget and Finance

Muhammad Hilaluddin, President, Angikar Bangladesh
Shaheen Alam, Project Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay
Shanchoy Chandra Sutradhar, Accounts Officer, Unnayan Shamannay
Shekhar Bhattacharje, Program Coordinator, CARE Bangladesh
Shoeib Shazzad Khan, Sr. Coordinator – Program, Manusher Jonno Foundation

Communication, Invitation, Reception, Press

A H M Foysoul, Media Manager, DORP
Asif Imran Khan, Advocacy Officer, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
M. Anowar Hossain, Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh
Mahbub Hasan, Senior Research Associate, Unnayan Shamannay
Monjur Rashid, Knowledge Management Coordinator, CARE Bangladesh
Md. Kamruzzaman, Coordinator-Research, Climate Change Unit, CCDB
Sharifuzzaman Sharif, General Secretary, NSS
Shekhar Bhattacharje, Program Coordinator, CARE Bangladesh
Sonia Tahera Kabir, Program Officer, Oxfam in Bangladesh
Subal Sarkar, Bangladesh Bhumihin Samity (BBS)
Zahid Rahman, Research and Advocacy Coordinator, Unnayan Shamannay

Website Development and Management

Asif Imran Khan, Advocacy Officer, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh
M. Anowar Hossain, Head of Technical Unit, Concern Worldwide, Bangladesh

PARTICIPATING ORGANISATIONS

1. **ADD International**
2. **Amra Kaj Kori**
3. **All Party Parliamentary Group**
4. **ASOD**
5. **ASSEDO**
6. **Australian Aid**
7. **Bangladesh Bhumihin Samity**
8. **Bangladesh Development Service Center**
9. **Bangladesh Krishok Federation**
10. **Bangladesh Krishani Shova**
11. **BOSS**
12. **CARE**
13. **CAMPE**
14. **Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh**
15. **CDF**
16. **CEDAR**
17. **Citizens' Solidarity**
18. **CLP**
19. **CNRS**
20. **Concern Worldwide**
21. **Debate for Democracy**
22. **D.net**
23. **DORP**
24. **Eco Social Development Organization**
25. **Friendship**
26. **GBUS**
27. **Gonochetona**
28. **Gono Unnayan Kendra**
29. **Gram Bikash Sangstha**
30. **Islamic Relief**
31. **JOBS**
32. **Jamuna Samaj Kallyan Sangstha**
33. **Jhanjira Samaj Kallayan Sangstha**
34. **KOINONIA**
35. **Mahideb Jubo Samaj Kallayan Somity**
36. **M4C**
37. **Ministry of LGRD**
38. **Manab Mukti Sangstha**
39. **Manusher Jonno Foundation**
40. **Maxwell Stamp Plc**
41. **National Development Programme**
42. **Nijera Kori**
43. **Online Knowledge Society**
44. **OVA**
45. **Oxfam in Bangladesh**
46. **Practical Action**
47. **Pollisree**
48. **Public Health Association of Bangladesh**
49. **Rehana Siddiqui Foundation**
50. **Resources Integration Centre**
51. **Resource Foundation**
52. **Rural Development Academy**
53. **Rural Friends Society**
54. **SEED**
55. **SKS Foundation**
56. **SNKS**
57. **Solidarity**
58. **Speed Trust**
59. **Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation**
60. **Swisscontact**
61. **UDPS**
62. **UK Aid**
63. **UNDP**
64. **United People's Trust**
65. **Unnayan Shahojogy Team**
66. **Unnayan Shamannay**
67. **Uttaran**
68. **VOICE**
69. **Water Aid**
70. **Wave Foundation**
71. **Youth Forum**





প্রথম
জাতীয় চর
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CONVENTION 2015

SECRETARIAT:

Unnayan Shamannay

Happy Rahman Plaza (4th floor),
25-26 Kazi Nazrul Islam Avenue,
Banglamotor, Dhaka, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-2-58610332
880-2-9664720

charbangladesh@gmail.com
www.charbangladesh.com

DESIGNED BY:

Naksha Impressions Ltd.

e-mail: nakshalimited@gmail.com
nakshalimited@hotmail.com
www.nakshabd.com