

Shahida Begum, A Women who struggles and survives against destructive river erosion

Bangladesh is known as the 'land of rivers' and major rivers that flow through Bangladesh are Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna with a complex network of 230 rivers including 57 international trans-boundary rivers. Due to its geographical Location, Bangladesh is most vulnerable to several natural disasters. Every year natural climates upset people's lives in some part of the country. Major disasters occurred in a regular basis in Bangladesh are flood, cyclone, and storm surge, flash flood, drought, tornado, riverbank erosion and land slide. Jamalpur district lies on the bank of the most treacherous river Brahmaputra. Due to its adverse weather condition,



it is an area of continuous flooding and its image is that of an area which is always flooded. Every part of the district is not equally vulnerable to flood. Some upazilas are more vulnerable than other due to their location. Severe periodic flooding is also common in the district. Every flood that strikes in Bangladesh affects Jamalpur district. Extensive floods greatly affect the marginal population, who lose whatever assets they have and suffer from lack of work and wages. Floods also cause serious damage to crops, property, fisheries, livestock and other resources.

Shahida Begum, a hardworking and self-employed woman has been living in Char Sisua Village under Shapdori Union of Islampur Upazila since 1997. She was born in kasharidoba village under Shapdhori union in 1982 and got married with Ukil Uddin at the age of 14. During early time her husband was engaged with agricultural farming and their life were going moderately well. When their first son took birth then devastating river erosion was occurred in this place and they lost everything. At that greatest vulnerable situation they were bound to migrate to another Char of Brahmaputra River named as Char Shishua which was also vulnerable for flood and river erosion. She said that here our days were going with severe sorrows as well as sufferings like scarcity of sufficient food, inadequacy of pure drinking water, absence of health facilities, malnutrition and deprived of other basic needs.

At first they started living with their relative's land. After some days they made a little thatched house and led a very miserable life. Her husband was engaged in agricultural works at that time. When their elder son reached age 6 then they faced another destructive river erosion. All their crops and households washed out and they had no place to go for living at that time. Then they again moved to the northern part of Char Shishua Village and started living there. In that

time her family grew larger day by day. For surviving their lives, her husband started tenant agriculture and she also worked in other's house to contribute for their family income. In that time they had to starve or nothing to eat for one or two times in a day and sometimes they couldn't manage their daily foods as a result children were suffered with malnutrition and many other diseases. Unfortunately they don't get any sorts of support from government, NGOs or other institutions/organizations during disaster and post disaster period. After 4 years, they faced another devastating flood and river erosion and resulting loss of their place of residence, crops and other resources. At that time they starved for days, weeks and months.

Then they moved to the Southern part of Char Sishua and they have been living for more than 8 years. At first they have no land and they built a little thatched house on other people's land. Now her family size is 9 and her husband is physically handicapped as he is paralyzed and can't move easily from one place to another. He runs a small shop in shishua bazaar and earns a little amount. They have three daughters and four sons and five of them go to school. They are not capable for paying their children's education. Her elder son is a meritorious student who studies honors in Dhaka and also live with great difficulties and sufferings. He manages his educational and other expenses by doing tuition. Sometimes we have to send him money for his educational expenses. He never got any scholarship from the government or other institution in spite of being very poor. If he would get any support from government or other organization then it would help him to get higher education. My second son is also meritorious and study in a college and third son studied in class 9.

Shahida Begum along with his two sons engaged in agriculture and they produce two times of crops in a year. One in Jaistha (Bengali month) and another one is in Chaitra (Bengali month). They have 2 acres land for cultivation and they produce Maize, Pepper, Pulse, wheat, paddy, nuts, onions and vegetables like brinjad. She said that most of the farmers now cultivate Maize in the replacement of Paddy. Because it needs minimum labor and provides much profit. She generally used Ground water (Shallow pumping of 90 feet) for irrigating their crops. She said that 3 to 4 times irrigation is needed for both Maize and Pepper cultivation. In case of Paddy cultivation, irrigation water is also essential but now a day people are more focused on cultivating Maize, Pepper and Mustard crops. She also added that 1 liter diesel oil is needed for 1 hour irrigation (approximately 65 taka per liter). Due to excessive price of diesel oil, she had to face an acute problem for maintaining continuous irrigation. She mentioned that char areas soil absorb much water that why they have to irrigate their crop land continuously. She added that female are also extensively engaged in agricultural works. Generally women cultivates pepper and nuts and they are also worked as an agri-labor. Women also participate in paddy harvesting, livestock rearing and hiring in the field.

Shahida Begum said that flood, river erosion and sand storm is very common in Shapdhor Union of Islampur upazila under Jamalpur District. Among these flood is the most frequent

phenomenon which is caused almost every year. Almost every year flood inundate the lands, wash out their crops and destroy their homes and assets. Flood in this area occurs in Ashar, Srati and Vadra (Bengali Month) and stay about 3 months at their homestead land and six months at the low land. In the last year in 2016 there was a severe flood which was about 7 feet higher from the normal water level. It creates huge problems on their livelihoods. As they don't have any cyclone shelter, so during disaster they fall in severe trouble. They cannot move as their needs. Sahida Begum also engaged in several social development work and she is an active member of village level child marriage protection committee. According to her speech women also participant in several community welfare decision making activities.

Poor people of this area mainly live in the bank of the river. People those who are rich, they buy land in the Islampur upazila and live there. They hardly come here for taking after their land, Poor are obliged to live here because they have no ability to buy land in the other area. That is why, poor people live in the char and migrate from one char to another char. People generally use river water for bathing and washing their cattle's. People who are living beside the bank of the river they use river water for irrigation purposes. Generally people use tube-well water for drinking purposes but during flood, they mix Fitkiri with the river water for purification and then use for drinking.

People of this area have limited knowledge on water policies and treaty for trans-boundary Brahmaputra river water management issues. Unfortunately they have no clear perception on this issues. People of this area don't get any sorts of benefits or facilities through these government water laws, policies and water treaty. They always struggle for their basic rights and most important one is that for their existence. They urging from all the related government authorities and NGOs for a sustainable solution for their miserable livelihood. Women in this area have the rights for taking decisions at household's level.

The impact of river is indescribable. It causes river erosion and flash flood at a regular interval. During the flood, crops are destroyed extensively. Again, it is very difficult to drink pure water in the period of flood. Women and girls face acute problem because of social safety and lack of sanitation facilities. People loss their settlements and crops. It is remarkable matter that there is no cyclone center and medical center in this area. People are deprived from the education facilities because during the flood, school, college and madras are gone under water. Communication system of this village is very poor. Boat is the only communication system which is not available all the time. She mentioned that boat is available 2 times in a day and it is 8 am-1 pm and 12pm-3pm. If anyone misses this time, he/she can't reach the destination. That is why, pregnant women and old women often faces acute danger. Especially in disaster period they face acute crisis of health and communication facilities.

Community suggested some coping strategies that can be helpful for reducing this damage occurred by river erosion and sudden flooding. The necessary number of cyclone cum educational center have to be established. Roads height and Household plinth has to raise and building dam on the bank of the river. She also added that flood is mainly occurred due to the excessive water came from India especially in the rainy season. Depth of the river has to increase and encourage for continuous river dredging. Unemployment problem has to remove through alternative income generating activities. There should be sufficient number of early warning messaging system and mobile team for mitigating the impact of pre and post disaster period. Here in south Shishua, 98% people are poor, destitute and live below the poverty line. The government doesn't invest here as this is a char of Brahmaputra River and here no development is sustainable. Even they don't get sufficient support from NGOs or other organizations. The people of this area have no opportunity to migrate to better place where they can lead a decent life because they don't have any savings.