

Untold Story of a Confident Women, who always struggles for Secured and Happier Life

Jamalpur district lies on the bank of the most treacherous river Brahmaputra. Due to its adverse weather and geographical condition, it is an area of perennial floods and every year some parts of the Jamalpur district is flooded. Some parts of this district are more vulnerable than others due to their geographical location. Shapdhuri, Belgasha, Chinaduli, Goaler Char, Gaibandha, Char Putimari and Char Gualiniunion are most flood affected areas of the Islampur upazila because major parts of these unions lay in the Brahmaputra and Jamuna River. These areas are affected by normal and flash flood almost every year. Severe periodic flooding is also common in the district. Every flood that strikes in Bangladesh affects Jamalpur district. Jamalpur is more or less flooded almost every year, like floods of 1988, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2004, 2007, 2008 and 2016. Extensive floods greatly affect the marginal population, who lose whatever assets they have and suffer from lack of work and wages. However, floods cause serious damage to crops, property, fisheries and livestock and other resources.

Fulera Begum, once leada happy life but worsening river erosion and continuous flooding has displaced her family several times. She now lives in Amtoli village of Shapdhuri Union under Jamalpur District. The age of this village is around 50 years. The massive flood was occurred in 1988 which destroyed her place of residence and washed out their crops and cattle's. In that time the whole char area was gone in to the river. The whole area was submerged under water and people became helpless. Around six years ago the char was formed again and people started living here. Around 150 households are now living here. Most of the people of this village live below the poverty line and they are failed to ensure their minimum livelihoods. Most of the people of this village are muslims in religion and only few Hindu (10 to 15) families are living here. Main earning source of the people of Amtoli village are agriculture. Majority of the people are tenant farmers and very few of them have own land. Major crops of these areas are maize, pepper, pulse, wheat, paddy, nuts, onions and vegetables. Marginal families (Hindu families) lives nearer to the river and they are engaged in



fishing but unfortunately they couldn't harvest/catch fish regularly from river because of government restriction on fishing during breeding time.

In 1967, Fulera Begum was born in Char Judduba under Shapdhor Union of Islampur Upazila. She had four sisters and two brothers. Among them she was just after the fourth. Her father was engaged in agriculture in Char Judduba and he had 4 to 5 capita cultivable land. Their family were goes well at that time but continuous river erosion destroyed their each and everything. All of their homestead land and cultivable land were gone into river due to continuous river erosion of mighty Brahmaputra River. She said that from her childhood she faced five times river erosion. At that time her family was suffered by extreme financial crisis and her father was bound to give her early marriage. At the age of 15, she got married with Afaz Uddin. Now they have three sons and one daughter. Among them her elder son is already got married and lives with them. He engaged in agriculture works and also engaged with some seasonal business. Her youngest son is read in class 9 and helped his father in cultivation. Unfortunately his second son is physically disable and couldn't do anything. Her daughter was also got married off but she is now living with Fulera Begum because of giving up by her husband.

River erosion is a common phenomenon in this village and people of this village always struggle for this unbearable situation. She mentioned that after the birth of her youngest son, her home was broken around 24 times due to river erosion and frequent flooding. In the mean time she moved from one place to another like Amtoli, Shishuar Char, and Kasharidoba and then finally shifted to Amtoli again. When she lived in Char Shishuar and Kasharidoba village she shifted from one side to another side of the char for several times because of continuous river erosion. The most tragic history is that within the last five years she faced five times river erosion. Now she has no land of her own. Due to the adverse impact of natural calamities, she lost all of his wealth and she became a hard core poor.

Her husband, Afaz Ahmed engaged in agriculture. Fulera Begum along with his two sons also helped them in agriculture. They generally produce two times of crops in a year. One in Jaistha (Bengali month) and another one is in Chaitra (Bengali month). They had taken a lease of 2 capita land from others and they produce maize, pepper, pulse, wheat, paddy, nuts, onions and vegetables. She said that most of the famers now cultivate Maize in the replacement of Paddy. Because it needs minimum labor and provides much profit. They usually produce 20 mounds of

corn and 7-8 mounds of pepper and 8 mounds of jute per capita. This year they are unable to cultivate pepper because of excessive rainfall. 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, pepper harvesting (30 taka per bag), livestock rearing and hiring in the field.

They 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, villagers often faced an acute crisis for maintaining continuous irrigation. She mentioned that char areas soil absorb much water that why they have to irrigate their crop land continuously.

Flood and river erosion are the major natural disasters extensively occurred in Shapdhori Union of Islampur upazila under Jamalpur District. Almost every year flood inundate the lands, wash out their crops and destroy their homes and assets. Flood specially occurs in Ashar, Srabon 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 to 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.

Communication system is very poor in Shapdhori union and it becomes horrible during disaster. Boat is the only way of communication although it is not available. She mentioned that boat is available only 2 times in a day and it is 8 am-12pm and 12pm-3pm. If anyone misses this time, he/she can't reach the destination. She also added that if anyone feels that boat is very urgent for him, then he has to pay 1000-1200 T.K. to the boatman. It is impossible for poor and deprived people. That is why, pregnant women and old women often faces acute danger. As there is no medical center, people need to go to Ghutail for better treatment facilities which takes almost 1 hour by boat which is not always found in due time. Serious patients, especially children, elderly people, pregnant women become the worst sufferers when they are taken to the clinic.

Poverty is one of the major problem in Amtoli village and most of the people of this village live below the poverty line. Most of the char areas people are illiterate. As a result early marriage,

dowry and social prejudices is a common characteristics of this village. Poor family often married their teenage girls and they have to pay huge amount of dowry. Climatic disasters like flood and river erosion destroy everything at a regular interval. 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. Because of unemployment in disaster time seasonal or temporary migration is a common picture of this village. People of this areas migrate to other places (Jamalpur, Barishal, Sylhet, Dhaka and Mymensing) in search of employment and generally engaged with day laboring works like rickshaw pulling, garments, jute mills, road and building construction.

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. During flood, women face a lot of problems and it is hard to bring up their children, cook and collect drinking water for their family because they have to collect water from other villages by boat. She also told that during flood people living here effected by various waterborne diseases such as diarrhea.

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. Fulerea Begum said that women are also engaged in several social development work and she herself engaged invillage development committee. According to her speech women also participant in several community welfare decision making activities.

She said that in the period of natural disaster, Union Parishad provide emergency support but unfortunately deprived and victim people couldn't get those support. Political influence, unequal

distribution, extreme communication and corruption are responsible for that. Although Union Chairman took some initiatives for repairing roads at Ghutail Bazar area. They also that local government institution provide some VGD and VGF support especially for poor and marginalized families. Unfortunately the support are very low in amount and very few in number. Government has no sustainable initiatives in Shapdhor Union in case of flood and river erosion management purposes.

Community people have already taken some initial initiatives minimize the impact of climatic disasters but they are urging some sustainable solution both from government and Non-government organizations 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.