

Dreams for a Better and Secured Life

Kulsum Begum a self-employed women once lead a happy life but worsening river erosion and continuous flooding has displaced her family several times. She was born in 1957 in Katiamari Char of Islampur Upazila under Jamalpur District. She was the eldest child of her parents. Her father had 3-4 capita cultivable land in Islampur Upazila. At that time their family was going well but during the flood 1988, all of their houses and cultivable land was going into the mighty Brahmaputra River. All of their crops were gone under water at that time. They fall in a big financial crisis and they moved from Katiamari Char to Char Arshahi in search of



employment and better livelihoods. She said that from her childhood she faced around 20 times river erosion. Because of continuous river erosion her family shifted from one place to another at a regular intervallike Char Arshahi, Char Kotapur, Char Majnabari, Char Vaniapara, Char Amtoli, Char Kasaridoba, Char Charsisuya and Char Projapoti. At the age of 17 she got married with Taleb Ali who was a farmer. They had three sons and a daughter. He produced several crops and vegetables in his 4 capita cropland. Their family was going well at them time. Again the mighty flood of 1988 destroyed their everything. She mentioned that flood water remained more than 1 month at that time. Several water borne disease broke out in an epidemic form. Her daughter was only four years old at that time and she was died in diarrhea. The mighty flood also responsible for the death of her beloved husband. Her husband Taleb Ali was died by Jaundice during the flood in 1988. The most smashing matter is that during the flood of 1988, she could not bury her husband and child's body, was forced to float it into the river.

Since 2013 Kulsum Begum with his three sons now live in Projapoti Char of Shapdhori Union under Jamalpur District. This char was first established in 1986 before that the whole area was under the Mighty Brahmaputra River. In the flood of 1988, the Char was gone into the river again. Around seven years ago, the char was formed again and started human settlements here. Around 400 households are now living here. Most of the people of this village are Muslims (around 98 percent) and they are mainly engaged with agricultural works. Only few of them are

Hindus and they are mainly engaged in fish harvesting from the Brahmaputra River. They mainly live nearer the bank of the river because of their occupation and financial inability. Sometimes they face difficulties in fish harvesting because of government restriction on fishing during breeding time. Although government provide some allocation during that time for the marginal fishermen but unfortunately the allocation is insufficient for mitigating their livelihoods. After coming here she experienced another 4 times flooding and river erosion. During flood time they temporary migrated to other areas and when the flood water goes down, they again coming back in this area. Kulsum Begums elder son is a mental patient and rest of her two sons were contribute to her family income. One is engaged in agricultural works and the other one is working in a garments factory placed in Gazipur, Dhaka.

Flood, river erosion and sand storm is very common in Shapdhori 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 generally 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 6 to 7 feet higher from the normal water level. It creates huge problems on their livelihoods. During flood time all of their crop land were gone into water and they have no employment opportunities. In that time most of the male people goes from outside (Jamalpur, Dhaka, Sylhet and Barisal) in search of better livelihoods. They engage in day laboring works like rickshaw pulling, works in garments, jute mills and building construction. They also move to other char areas for survival and they need to spend a big amount for staying those areas.

Most of households in this village are engage in agricultural works. Kulsum Begum has no cultivable land of her own. She along with her sons produce two times of crops in a year on other land. One in Jaistha (Bengali month) and another one is in Chaitra (Bengali month). She 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. She has to give one third of the produced crops to the land owner. Sometimes the flood water suddenly inundated their cropland and destroyed their all crops. At that time they lead a miserable life with an acute shortage of food and livelihoods. 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. She also rears cattle's and goats with the help of her daughters-in-law.

People 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, people had to face an acute problem for maintaining continuous irrigation. Most of the farmers living in this char do not have their own shallow machine. So they have to hire shallow machine for irrigation purposes from those who have owned an irrigation machine or from the land owners. Everyone has to pay 200 taka per hour for using shallow machine and due to sandy earth it is needed to provide more irrigation which is too much costly.

Projapoti char in the middle of the river are cut off from the other villages of the union. So the children of this char areas cannot go to schools located at other villages due to risky and troublesome communication. The children of Projapoti Char are reluctant to go to Chengania Government Primary School at village Chengania of the union as they are to walk at least two kilometers through sandy path and cross around half a kilometer of river by boat. On the other hand, the children of Projapoti char do not go to char shishua Govt. Primary School at all as they are to walk four kilometers sandy path and cross half a kilometer of river. The situation has been prevailing since the start of human settlement at Projapoti char and thus people of the areas have become illiterate and so do the children. Meanwhile the people of this char area are suffering badly for want of a community clinic and union health center. People of this char alleged that they do not get health services as they are living in remote char areas. The upazila health complex is around 18km away from the char. Patients have to walk three km, cross five km of Brahmaputra River and then go another 10 km by motor vehicles to reach the health complex. Serious patients, especially children, elderly people, pregnant women become the worst sufferers when they are taken to the upazila health complex amid such troublesome communication. She

said that even no NGOs have come forward with formal or informal schooling for the children yet. "Moreover, people are suffering much as there is no community clinic there," she added.

Communication system is very root in Projapoti Char. Boat is the main communication system but it is not always available. She mentioned that boat is available 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 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 to bear everyone. She urged for the improvement of communication system and at least ensure available boats in Boat station.

Poverty is one of the major problem in Char Projapoti 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 this char areas. 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. 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. Because of illiteracy women in this area have not the rights for taking decisions both at household's and society level.

Kulsum Begum said that people living here don't get any scope to involve themselves in any social development works. Unfortunately there is no government and NGO support for improving their livelihood patterns. She claimed that they do not get any help from any government and non-government organization. She mentioned that necessary steps should be needed to improve the livelihood pattern of the villagers. This can be done through construction of educational institution, community clinic, cyclone shelter, early warning messaging system, improved internal and external communication system, ensure alternative income generating activities during the period of flood and enhance women participation in decision making process.

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