

NGOs' Maneuver for Development and Empowerment of *Char* People in Bangladesh

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Abstract

More than 6.5 million people live in *charland* in Bangladesh. They are isolated from the mainland and are deprived of the basic needs for ensuring good standards of life. This deprivation leads them to a merely powerless situation from which they can hardly escape. Without being entitled to the landed property, the *char* people cannot improve their socio-economic condition. The frequent natural disasters aggravate their marginal position. Even if NGOs' intervention in their life pattern somehow ameliorates their socio economic condition to such an extent that can make them capable enough to come out of the vicious circle of poverty, their brightening future diminishes soon after a natural disaster occurs or the maneuver of the intervention metes a failure of what the NGOs set for out to the *char* people. The severe reluctance of the administrative services for neither empowering the *char* people to have an entitlement to the natural resources (land included) nor initiating *char* people-oriented developmental activities amply deserves the penury in which they are living. The objective of this paper is to assess the initiatives undertaken by NGOs for the development of *char* people, the most marginalised group in Bangladesh. It also explores the limitations of the initiatives and put forward possible ways in this respect. However, this paper follows a mix method. Though this paper is mainly based on primary data, secondary data have also been consulted to prepare it.

Keywords: *Charland*, Development, Empowerment

Introduction

Although remarkable progress has been achieved in many sectors, Bangladesh is still noted as one of the poorest countries in the world. People have not yet come out from the vicious circle of poverty. More than one-third populations of this country live in under the poverty line. Moreover, about 6.5 million people of Bangladesh live in the *char* areas who live from hand to mouth and desperately need different institutional supports for sustainable development (Rahman 2005).

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In brief, *charlands* are areas of new land formed through the continual process of erosion and deposition in the major rivers and coastal areas of Bangladesh. The whole of the *charland* is unstable and exposed to a range of environmental shocks and stresses associated with the unpredictability of the river.

However, *char* people have got into a trap of agony, misery and dispossession. About 90 percent of the *char* people are river eroded with almost all of them being landless or functional landless and 97 percent living without rehabilitation (Barkat, *et al.* 2007). Conflict, violence and bloodshed seem to be a never-ending dilemma in the life in *char*. Within the overall socio-economic and political context of Bangladesh, *charland* remains an ignored national resource. Rescuing *charlands* from illegal occupation and grabbing, redistribution of those among the poor people in the *chars*, appropriate management of *charlands*, enactment and implementation of pertinent rules and practices, and participation of *char* people in the process – all these constitute prime issues of agrarian reform in Bangladesh (Barkat *et al.* 2007).

To ensure development of *char* people in Bangladesh, their right to land and right to rehabilitation should be realized. This is why strong political commitment with respect to *char* people's voice and organized movement is necessary. To realize these, there is no alternative but creating awareness among *char* people about their rights. In this respect, a number of NGOs are working in the *char* areas for the development of its people in Bangladesh.

However, this paper has been divided into four parts. In addition to introduction, objectives and methodology have been stated in the introductory part. In the second part, it makes a discussion about key terms and their operationalization. In part three, it contains discussions of data, gathered from the field, findings and analysis of these data and finding under the heading of 'results and discussions.' Finally, in the last part, it presents recommendations and conclusion.

Causes of poverty and vulnerability of *char* people

Bangladesh has already achieved remarkable progress in terms of poverty reduction owing to steady economic growth and strong bilateral and multilateral supports along with the government during the last one decade. In spite of such commendable credits, extreme poverty remains high, afflicting 17.6 percent of the population in the country (The Daily Star 2015). And, the people living in *char* areas are among the most vulnerable in terms of extreme poverty. However, the study reveals that lack of awareness was one of the major causes for poverty and vulnerability of *char* dwellers. Moreover, frequent river erosion

is another factor for their miseries. Isolation from mainland is considered as another reason for their distress. It is observed that there is lack of employment opportunities which is considered as one of the key factors for poverty and misery. Lack of proper knowledge about cultivation and crop diversification was revealed as another source of poverty and vulnerability of the people of *char* areas. It is learnt that before NGO intervention in *char* areas, people, mostly male, were passing their times in 'good for nothing' work. After NGO intervention, the scenario has been changed. The *char* dwellers, both the male and female, have become active in income generating activities and also aware about their fate.

Objectives of the article

The general objectives of this paper are to explore the problems of the poor *char* dwellers and to understand the maneuver of NGOs on the process of reducing poverty and development of *char* people. However, the specific objectives are:

- i. To know the socio economic status of poor people in *charlands*;
- ii. To explore the factors of their poverty and vulnerability; and
- iii. To assess the activities of NGOs in term of development and empowerment of *char* people.

1.4 Methodology

This paper is an outcome of a research study which was conducted following case study method in *charlands* of Gaibandha District. But this paper is dominated by quantitative data. However, the logic for the choice of case study method lied with the research problem dealing mostly with 'why' and 'how' questions. This research studied this specific case as a whole and was able to manage the systematic control over the sources of variation and make an understanding of the process of poverty and vulnerability. However, out of seven upazilas, three upazilas (Sunderganj, Fulchari and Shaghata) were selected to make this study representative in *character* where poor people experiences and participated in the development activities of local NGOs and nine *chars* (three from each upazila) were selected randomly but preferences were given where highest number of people lives. However, the number of total respondents was 262. The selection of sample size is made on the basis of size of *char* areas. Most of them were female. The selection has been done on the basis of information provided by local people and NGO's list of the group members. On the other hand, although several local NGOs are working in the *char* areas, among them, Samaj Kallyan Sangstha (SKS) and Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK) were selected purposively for this study.

However, this is mainly based on primary data and secondary data have also been consulted to prepare it. Different methods and their respective techniques have

been used to collect primary data. They are: (a) Open-ended and closed ended questionnaire survey (b) In-depth Interview (c) Focus Group Discussion, and (d) Observation. These data collection techniques are used to get quality and qualitative data. Open-ended and closed ended questionnaire techniques have been used to collect general data easily. On the other hand, in-depth interview is very important to explore and get the real information about the research issue. Through this interview, researcher can realize the intensity, insight story, degree of untold sufferings or so on of respondents and research issue. So, for qualitative research it is very much useful. Besides, focus group discussion makes a clear conception about ambiguity of data and it also paves the way of cross-check of data. Nobody can deny or ignore the scene that has been seen by own eye. Observation does the same. But observation is more than that. So, researcher cannot keep eyes closed during his/her research or field visit for collecting primary data and it has deeply been observed the whole situation. Therefore, it can be said that these data collection tools are very useful for getting and collecting qualitative data.

Concept and operationalization of key terms

Charland

Chars are areas of new land formed through the continual process of erosion and deposition in the major rivers and coastal areas. The whole of the *charland* is unstable and exposed to a range of environmental shocks and stresses (particularly flooding, and river bank erosion) associated with the unpredictability of the river. On the basis of its structure, size, type, and stability, a *char* can be categorized in four different ways: (i) as newly raised *charland*, (ii) as old and permanent *charland*, (iii) as a *char* with human habitation, and (iv) as a *char* not yet inhabited. On the basis of location, *chars* may be isolated from the mainland or located on a riverbed or river basin (river bank) (Chowdhury, 2008). The *chars* are home to some of the poorest and most vulnerable communities in Bangladesh; over 80 per cent live in extreme poverty.

Development

Development is a very elusive concept. According to some researchers, development, in a technical sense, refers to qualitative and structural changes in the state of an economy. Some other researchers are of opinion that development refers to a relatively stable long range increase in real national income that is accompanied by a change in the attitudes of the people, their motivation, institutional set-up, production techniques, etc. Development, from another angle, may refer to the production and utilisation of material resources or to the enrichment of human resources. Material means of production refers to the

economic factors in development, whereas enrichment of human capital refers to the non-economic factors such as the social, political, ethnic or educational background of the people who participate in the development tasks. The non-economic factors include the quality of social life, organisational framework, caste, class, language, religion and other diversities in the group, level of literacy, etc. However, Jahan (2010:11) rightly asserts that

Development is all about people. The basic objective of development is to create an enabling environment for people to enjoy a long, healthy and creative life. [...] People are the real wealth of a nation and the ultimate goal of development is thus to enhance human lives and human well-being.

So, this paper focuses on economic factors and stresses mainly on the quality of social life in the context of *char* people. Among many other indicators, income, education, health care and drinking water are brought under investigation in light with the socio-economic development of *char* people.

2.3 Empowerment

The term empowerment as Pillai (1995) explained is “an active multidimensional process which enables men and women to realise their full identity and power in all spheres of life”. Keller and Mbwewe (1991, as cited in Rowlands 1995) described it as

“a process whereby women become able to organize themselves to increase their own self-reliance, to assert their independent right to make choices and to control resources which will assist in challenging and eliminating their own subordination.” CIDA sees empowerment as "Empowerment is about people - both women and men - taking control over their lives: setting their own agenda, gaining skills, increasing self-confidence, solving problems, and developing self-reliance. It is both a process and an outcome" (CIDA 1994: Annex 3:.3).

ODA observes empowerment as

"A term generally used to describe a process by which powerless people become conscious of their own situation and organise collectively to gain greater access to public services or to the benefits of economic growth" (ODA 1994: 32).

So, empowerment is about enhancing the capacity of poor women and men to influence state institutions, political and social process that shape resource allocation and public policy choices which affect their lives and to gain to access to resources (Singha and Titi 1995). At a more generic level, empowerment

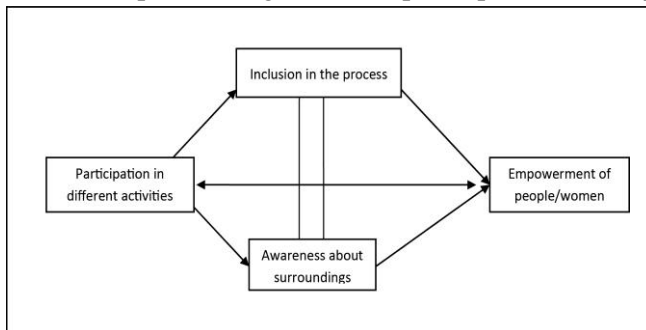
means strengthening the meaning and reality of principles of inclusiveness (i.e. engaging the relevant stakeholders in a process) and accountability held in common with the notion of democracy. Bennett (2002) describes empowerment as “the enhancement of assets and capabilities of diverse individuals and groups to engage, influence and hold accountable the institutions which affect them.” Whatever the meaning empowerment denotes, as a tool for the reversal of powerlessness it has to be multifaceted and multidimensional in nature just rather than a theoretical construct to be meaningful. Therefore, identifying elements or necessary conditions for empowerment are central to understanding the concrete manifestation of the process.

Among different approaches, this paper focuses on the socio-economic empowerment of poor that refers to the process which enables people to realise their full identity and power to obtain the responsibility for their own future.

Participation as a tool for empowerment

Ensuring participation in economic social and environmental activities is essential to promote their development. Through participating in different activities poor people could bring about the needed changes in family’, society and in every spheres of life. For example, if poor participate in various social and economic activities their social inclusion improves as well as their awareness. Awareness marks an initiative in the process of social change .Unless one knows the social reality, one cannot envisage change. Awareness indicates the extent of knowledge or information (Hazel D ’Lima 1983 cited in Thompson, 2002). In this way, participation in different activities used as a tool that leads to empowerment of poor which further increased their demand for broader and meaningful participation in socio, economic, political and environmental issues of the community and state. The hypothetical relationship between participation, inclusion, awareness and empowerment is depicted in the following figure 1.0.

Figure 1.0: The conceptual linkage between participation and empowerment



In this study, it looks into the nature of *char* people's participation in economic, social and disaster management programmes and the consequent changes in their lives.

The foregoing discussions make us clear that the local NGOs are operating different programmes and through these programmes they run different activities for the socio-economic development of *char* dwellers. For this, NGOs are following participation approach so that *char* people can be involved with their activities and become empowered.

Results and Discussions

NGOs' Maneuver for Development and Empowerment of Char People in Bangladesh

Generally, the *char* dwellers are very vulnerable in terms of their socio-economic conditions. During visiting the *char* areas, it is observed that the physical conditions of *char* people are not healthy. The houses of *char* areas are made by bamboos, straw and mud. To explore the socio-economic conditions of *char* people and NGOs' maneuver in *char*lands, people of these areas are questioned through a structured and semi-structured questionnaire. In addition, focus group discussions are also arranged to know about different issues they are facing frequently over the years. However, discussions have been arranged into three heads: (i) Socio-economic profile of respondents (ii) Waves of NGO intervention in socio-economic arena, and (iii) NGOs' maneuver for empowerment of *char* people. It covers two objectives such as (i) to know the socio economic status of poor people living in *char* areas, and (ii) to assess the activities of NGOs in term of development and empowerment of *char* people. Moreover, a discussion has been made covering the objective, to explore the factors of their poverty and vulnerability, at the later part of this section.

Socio-economic profile of respondents

A total of 262 respondents were brought under this study. Among the respondents, 92 percent were female and eight percent were male. The age of the respondents was between 15 and above. The highest percentage of age of the respondents was between 26 and 35 years (37%) followed by the 36 to 45 years (26.3%) age group. 20.2 percent of the respondents were 15 to 25 years whereas 11.1 percent of the respondents were 46 to 55 years and 5.3 percent were above 56 years respectively (Table:3.2.1).

As most of the respondents were female, 70.2 percent of total respondents were house wife followed by 18.3 percent farmer. 3.1 percent of the respondents were day labourers and the rest of the respondents were engaged in different profession such as petty trading, boating and begging (Table: 3.2.1). It is learnt that house wives are, in most cases, responsible to maintain their family in *charlands*. Alongside household works, they also engage themselves in farming in the field with their husbands. About marital status of the respondents, data shows that as many as 85.5 percent of total respondents are married followed by 11.1 percent widows. The rest of the respondents were in category of divorced, deserted and unmarried. It is also learnt that the incident of divorced and deserted are happened due to dowry and poverty. Although poverty grips the *char* people, they are indifferent about increasing of their family members. Data about family members of the respondents reveal that the family members of 26.7 percent of the respondents have five, 19.8 percent of the respondents have four, 14.1 percent of the respondents have six and 8.4 percent of the respondents have eight respectively. 3.1 percent of the respondents have 9 members of their family (Table: 3.2.2). It is observed that people of *charlands* are not so aware about family planning. However, local NGOs are also implementing some projects in this regard.

The socio-economic conditions of *char* dwellers are very miserable. According to the study, 63.7 percent of the respondents have no own landed property. Even their houses stand on lands of others. Among them, 57.6 percent of the respondents said that they had lost their landed property due to river erosion. Some respondent said that they had lost their landed property due to frequent movement from one *char* to another *char* (Table: 3.2.3). It can be said that without being entitled to the landed property, the *char* people cannot improve their socio-economic condition. Data also reveal that houses of 51.5 percent of the respondents have been made by tin whereas houses of the rest of the respondents are made by bamboos or thatched (Table: 3.2.4). Alongside the household conditions, the living condition of *char* people is also very miserable. The study reveals that 80.5 percent of the respondents cannot take food regularly. Even they remain fasting frequently. Only 15.3 percent of the respondents said that they could take food twice a day regularly. It is observed that 4.2 percent of the respondents hesitate disclosing their miserable conditions in this respect.

About cultivation, the study reveals that 44.7 percent of the respondents cultivate paddy, jute and vegetables. 13.4 percent of the respondents cultivate vegetables only while 10.7 percent of the respondents cultivate paddy and jute. A major portion of the respondents (30.2%) do not cultivate any crops due to having no

land. The study reveals that 71.4 percent of the respondents had no properties such as cow, goat, poultry, land, etc. before engagement with the activities of NGOs. In contrast, on the other hand, as many as 90.8 percent of the respondents have now such types of properties after engagement with the activities of NGOs (Table: 3.2.5). It is the achievement of NGOs in one hand and on the other hand, people of *charlands* have seen their living condition better than earlier. It may be mentioned here that the improvement of quality of living condition of *char* dwellers (respondents) has been accounted here after their involvement with the NGOs' activities. The socio-economic profiles of respondents can be found in the following tables:

Table: 3.2.1 Sex and age of respondents

Sex	Frequency	%	Age	Frequency	%	Profession	Frequency	%
Male	21	8.0	15-25	53	20.2	Farmer	48	18.3
Female	241	92.0	26-35	97	37.0	Day labourer	8	3.1
Total	262	100.0	36-45	69	26.3	House wife	184	70.2
			46-55	29	11.1	Boat man	1	.4
			56 & above	14	5.3	Business	1	.4
			Total	262	100.0	Others	20	7.6
						Total	262	100.0

Table: 3.2.2 Marital status and family members

Marital status	Frequency	%	family members of respondents	Frequency	%
Unmarried	1	.4	2.00	15	5.7
Married	224	85.5	3.00	31	11.8
Widow	29	11.1	4.00	52	19.8
Divorced	3	1.1	5.00	70	26.7
Deserted	5	1.9	6.00	37	14.1
Total	262	100.0	7.00	18	6.9
			8.00	22	8.4
			9.00	8	3.1
			10.00	4	1.5
			11.00	4	1.5
			19.00	1	.4
			Total	262	100.0

Table: 3.2.3 Status of Land possession of respondents

Possession of land	Frequency	%	Causes of loss of land property	Frequency	%
Yes	74	28.2	-	-	-
No	188	71.8	eroded in river	151	57.6
			due to coming from other place	30	11.5
			sold out due to poverty	7	2.7
Total	262	100.0	Total	262	100.0

Table: 3.2.4 Condition of homestead

Houses stand own land	Frequency	%	House is built of	Frequency	%
No	167	63.7	Tin	135	51.5
Yes	95	36.3	Brick building	3	1.1
Total	262	100.0	Bamboo/thatched	124	47.3
			Total	262	100.0

Table: 3.2.5 Comparative scenario of possession of properties

Properties before involvement with NGO activities			Properties after involvement with NGO activities		
	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
No	187	71.4	cow/poultry/land/ram/goat	238	90.8
Yes	43	16.4	boat/ornament	4	1.5
No comment	32	12.2	No	4	1.5
Total	262	100.0	No comment	16	6.1
			Total	262	100.0

Waves of NGO intervention in socio-economic development

NGOs' maneuver in *char*lands brings positive changes among the *char* dwellers in terms of their socio economic status. It makes them aware about their fundamental rights, disaster management techniques, empowerment, etc. In terms of socio economic status, NGOs' intercession brings a great impact on *char* dwellers. These are discussed below in different tables.

Table: 3.3.1 Comparative scenario of monthly income of respondents

After NGO intervention, monthly income of respondents			Before NGO intervention, monthly income of respondents		
Tk	Frequency	%	Tk	Frequency	%
100-1000	82	31.3	100-1000	45	17.2
1001-4000	143	54.2	1001-4000	95	36.3
4001-8000	8	3.1	4001-8000	3	1.1
Total	233	88.9	Total	143	54.6
No Answer	29	11.1	No income	119	45.4
Total	262	100.0	Total	262	100.0

The above table: 3.3.1 shows the monthly income of respondents after and before engagement with NGO's activities. After involvement with NGOs, the monthly income of 31.3 percent of the respondents is between Tk. 100 and Tk.1000 in contrast to 17.2 percent of respondents. The monthly income of 54.2 percent of the respondents has increased between Tk.1001 and Tk.4000 in contrast to 36.3 percent of respondents. About 11.1 percent of the respondents have not given any answer in this regard. On the other hand, the notable feature of this table is that as many as 54.6 percent of the respondents had no income before involvement with NGOs. They just lived hand to mouth. It is another achievement of NGOs. It reveals that NGO intervention has brought a positive impact on raising income which contributes to better livelihood of *char* people. About increasing of their income, the *char* people said that they had been trained in most cases for skill development to cultivate different crops, vegetables and rearing poultry. However, the income interval has been fixed after pre-test of the study for easy presentation and analysis. For this, among many tools, 'respondent debriefing' technique has been used.

Table: 3.3.2 Comparative status of collecting drinking water

Collection of drinking water before involvement with NGO			Collection of drinking water after involvement with NGO		
	Frequency	%		Frequency	%
Well	2	.8	Well	2	.8
Tube well	204	77.9	Tube well	254	96.9
Pond	5	1.9	Pond	0	0
River	31	11.8	River	2	.8
Canal/beel	15	5.7	Canal/beel	0	0
No comment	5	1.9	No comment	4	1.5
Total	262	100.0	Total	262	100.0

Pure drinking water is very important for healthy life. NGO intervention on *charlands* brings a positive impact in this regard. The table-3.3.2 reveals that almost 97 percent of the respondents drink and use water collecting from tube well after NGO intercession in contrast to about 78 percent of the respondents. The rate of collecting drinking water from river has also decreased after NGO intervention on them. After NGO intervention, another important change is visible among the *char* dwellers. Now nobody collect water from pond and canal or *beel* for household works.

Not only pure drinking water but also improved sanitation system, one of the key indicators for social development, is one of the major elements for healthy life. The study reveals that almost all the respondents (95.4%) said that they used specific places made by mud, *bera*/bamboo, sacks or brick, for human disposal. After NGO intervention, only 4.6 percent of the respondents in contrast to about 44 percent of respondents use open sky for this purpose. Consequently, illness among *char* dwellers has decreased, the respondents claimed. The respondents also said that they all take vaccine for children and pregnant mothers from NGO health workers or government hospitals. It was almost absent among *char* dwellers before NGO intercession, the study reveals.

'Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world,' Nelson Mandela, claims it. Really it is true for all over the world. The scenario of education in the study areas was not pleasant before NGO intervention. After NGO intervention, there has been made a remarkable change in this sector, the most powerful element for socio-economic development. Owing to awareness made by NGOs, children of 80.9 percent of the respondents go to schools but they alleged the quality of schools is very poor and absence of teachers is very common phenomenon in *char* areas.

However, above mentioned data and discussion indicate that NGOs' maneuver bring a lot positive changes in socio-economic development of the respondents of *charlands*. Different income generating programmes of NGOs have brought encouraging and hopeful changes in the lives of *char* dwellers. On the other hand, programmes for socio-behavioral development of *char* peoples have also become inspiring. Through these programmes, the behavioral changes among the respondents of *char* dwellers have improved, it is observed. The respondents are now conscious about their health and health care facilities.

NGOs' maneuver for empowerment of *char* people

Char people are very indifferent to their rights. They are also impassive about their empowerment, participation in decision making, social programmes,

expression of opinion, etc. In this section, NGOs' scheme for empowering of *char* dwellers, in terms of their participation, decision-making and awareness, has been discussed.

Participation is considered as a cornerstone of development. After NGO intervention on *char* dwellers, the level of participation has improved among them. The study reveals that although social status of 11.1 percent of the respondents has brought no change, 80.2 percent of the respondents claim remarkable changes in their social status after involvement with the activities of NGOs. 8.8 percent of the respondents refrained making any comment in this regard. However, about improvement of social status, the *char* dwellers said that they had been given importance in decision making in social activities. They had been consulted about social affairs such as dispute settlement, marriage issue, and anti-dowry matter. They had also been invited for many social and religious events.

Not only increasing of participation of respondents in social programmes but also opinion of respondents is given priority in different social programmes such as marriage, family meeting, etc. The study reveals that opinions of as many as 93.9 percent of the respondents are given to priority and importance in meetings. It is very significant for empowerment of *char* people. As a result of participation in different meetings, dissemination of information about age of marriage, registration of marriage, anti-dowry laws, child birth registration and their vaccination has been possible. About 90 percent of the respondents registered their marriage and about 95 percent of the respondents have given vaccination to their children, the study reveals.

As most of the respondents are female, they said that their opinions were given importance in decision making in family affairs such as children's schooling, marriage of daughters. About 84 percent of the respondents said that both husband and wife take decision about schooling of their children while 85 percent of the respondents said that both husband and wife take decision about their daughter's marriage. Most of the respondents said that opinions of female of *charlands* were not given importance before intervention of NGOs. So, inclusion of women in decision making process is one of the major components of empowerment which is appeared in the *charlands*. The study also reveals that female of *charlands* are more aware about their rights than earlier. They know about anti-dowry laws and protest it. They resist torture on them. According to the study, 84 percent of the respondents have the knowledge about laws to stop women torture and if it is happened, they go for legal help to police station or any

other means. People of *char* areas are also are about their political rights. They cast their vote by own choice and decision. The study reveals that 87.4 percent of the respondents cast their vote by own decision. They also take part in different rallies and meetings.

Findings of the Study

During focus group discussion (FGD), the participants said they are facing a series of problems. They are isolated from mainland. They are deprived of government services and facilities. There is lack of opportunities to income generation activities and no opportunities for employment. It is also revealed that a few people of *char* areas get relief or other assistance from government during disaster or post disaster. It is also learnt that emergency relief is hardly reached in *char* areas. After disaster, government rehabilitation programme is not enough. Not only during disaster but also other time all over the year, the government assistance programmes in *charlands* are not enough. They claim they are also neglected. They said emergency medical care is a dream for *char* dwellers. According to the study, there is no government hospital or clinic in *char* areas. In emergency cases, if they need medical care, they face communication problems acute as there is no alternative but boat to go government hospitals or clinic in town which is far distance from *charlands*. Transportation problems are an important issue for *char* residents. In rainy season, the *char* people face severe problem of communication. There is no way of communication of but boat to go here and there to meet up their needs. In dry seasons, *char* dwellers of some *charlands* can move on foot or by rickshaw or van to go to main land to realize their purposes. On the other hand, there are no minimum civic facilities in *charlands*. There is no bazaar (market) enough in *char* areas. For this, they spend more or less one-day to go and come from bazaar. In addition, there is no electricity facility in *charlands*. Educational problem is another problem for *char* inhabitants. Due to lack of enough educational institution especially government educational institution, the light of learning is still dream for *char* people. Four Upazillas out of seven of Gaibandha District are adjacent to rivers. These are Gaibandah Sadar, Fulchari, Shaghata and Sundarganj. There are 13 unions in these four Upazillas and there are 54 *chars*. According to government officials, there are 98 primary schools in these *charlands*. Among these, 47 are government primary schools and the rest 51 are government registered private schools (Prothom Alo November 4 2009). It is officials' statistics but the *char* people claim there is no existence of such enough figures in *charlands*. Many schools have gone into river due river erosion.

However, there is news of happy for *char* people. NGOs' maneuver in *charlands* has brought positive impact on socio-economic condition of *char* residents. Owing to NGO intervention in *charlands*, the inhabitants of *chars* have become aware about their rights such as health care, education as well as disaster management, rearing poultry, agriculture, etc. The *char* dwellers especially women are very aware about their rights. Now, they can participate in decision-making in family affairs, such as marriage of their daughters, schooling of children. Women register their marriage and their children at birth. The *char* people are of opinion to increase the programmes of NGOs in *charlands*. They also seek government support more to improve their socio-economic conditions. On the other hand, there are some limitations, facing by NGOs to implement their programmes and projects in *charlands*. Officials of NGOs reveal that *char* dwellers are very indifferent about their lives and rights. They strongly depend on nature. They believe that they have nothing to do to get rid of misery. Perception of *char* dwellers about NGOs is not so good. Despite such type of limitations, officials of NGOs are working in these areas. They said due to frequent river erosion, sustainable programmes cannot be ensured. Infrastructural development is very costly. It needs huge financial support which is one of the barriers for them to bring people under safe zone during disasters. Settlement of land dispute is very difficult in *charlands*. They cannot resolve such types of problems effectively. 'Might is right' is the main weapon for land ownership in *charlands* which is very important for empowerment and development of *char* residents.

By understanding the nature of the problems, the local NGOs working in the *char* areas have been able to initiate development programmes for the people of these areas. The objectives of the development programmes of local NGOs are to reduce the vulnerabilities of *char* residents, particularly of women. Through different programmes such as micro-credit, health care, disaster management, education, agriculture, advocacy, training and income generating activities, the local NGOs have brought remarkable positive impact on lives of *char* dwellers. They have launched the formation of women's groups that provide health, education, agricultural, disaster management and training services for improvement of their well being. On the other hand, some other programmes such as Income and Employment Generation Programme (IEGP) and Improvement of Livelihood and Protect Income Erosion Programme, appreciably reduce the women's vulnerability by increasing their income and property.

Recommendations and conclusion

Recommendations

A number of NGOs are working in the *char* areas. Reduce of vulnerability caused by different types of disasters in *char* areas is one of the major programmes of NGOs. However, objectives of these NGOs are to improve the socio-economic conditions of the *char* residents. After analysing the findings of the study, some recommendations for the development of *char* dwellers are stated below.

- i. A comprehensive long term planning should be undertaken for overall development of *char* people. For this, collaboration and cooperation between government and NGOs are needed to formulate plans and implement these.
- ii. Over-lapping of programmes should be avoided. NGOs should work together to avoid duplication of programmes. For this, the government should play a coordinating role in this respect.
- iii. Visit of government officials like agricultural officials, health officials or workers should be regular in *char* areas.
- iv. Government support such as providing credit, seeds, fertilizer, training, etc. regarding agriculture should be increased.
- v. Frequent visit and necessary initiatives should be taken by officials of union *parishad* (chairmen and members) and members of parliament (MPs) for the improvement of *char* areas.
- vi. *Khas*³ land in *char* areas should be distributed among the landless of *char* residents. For this, law enforcing agencies, land settlement office, local political leaders and NGOs all together need to work jointly for proper distribution of *khas* land.
- vii. Both the government and NGOs should take such types of arrangement i.e. whole sale market so that the *char* resident can sell their produced products and get fair price.
- viii. Access of government facilities should be available and ensured for *char* residents.
- ix. Awareness programmes should be increased in *char*lands by both the government and NGOs.

³ *Khas* land refers to that land where there is no private ownership. Ownership of such land belongs to the government.

- x. The programmes related to crops diversification should be increased. For this, the *char* residents should be trained how to cultivate their land for more than once with multiple crops.

4.2 Conclusion

The study seeks to know the impact of NGO intervention on the socio-economic conditions of *char* inhabitants. During the study, it is observed that now *char* people are more aware about their rights to different government services. This is certainly a positive and good sign. The government should come forward sincerely to address the general inadequate public services in the *char* areas. It is also observed that NGOs' maneuver on *char*lands has made the *char* residents more aware about their sustainable livelihood. For this, the *char* residents demand that the activities of NGOs must be continued. In addition, the NGOs should continue their advocacy to stimulate the government agencies for providing the services which are very much needed to *char* people. Furthermore, greater co-operation and co-ordination between government and NGOs can facilitate more to reduce the vulnerability of *char* inhabitants and extend their support for sustainable development.

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