

Hardship Continues for the People Residing on the Bank of Pashur River

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Coastal regions are probably the most valuable and economically important area between the land and the sea. Here the ecosystems are highly vulnerable to climate change-induced natural hazards like coastal inundation, tsunamis, salinity intrusion, sea level rise, cyclones, etc. The rising sea level and the increasing intensity of tropical cyclones due to changing climate along the coastal area have undoubtedly expanded the risk and vulnerability of local communities inhabiting ecologically sensitive deltaic tracts of the Southwestern region of Bangladesh.

This phenomenon is affecting the living conditions of the people in the Southwestern coastal region. Here, people are in a constant battle against recurring natural disasters. The regular

habitation in this region is changing due to frequent surges and storms. Individuals' sufferings are in an ever-growing state. Every year people are affected by devastating storms. Subsequently, the dreams of many people are getting eradicated. Sukannya Rani, a 55-year-old woman living on the Bank of Pussur River in Mongla, is one of them. About forty years back, she was married to a young man living in the South Kanainagar of Chilla Union village. Her husband, Mikhail Mridha, was a fisherman. She was living happily with her husband in their house on the river bank. But now she literally has nothing. Her husband died eight years ago, leaving them with only one male child. It was the seventh time she had to abandon her home due to river erosion. Last time the attack of Cyclone Yaas

destroyed her house. Frustrated with the current situation, she took a deep breath and said, "We've lost all ancestral lands, and I don't have any permanent address now."

She also added, "We wake up at night when the high tide starts; everything is submerged in the water. We can't make a fire on the stove and are unable to cook our food. This is our everyday picture." While explaining her situation, she was looking at the river with deep sadness in her mind. Presently, she goes fishing with her son in the river. She added, "We depend on the river for our livelihood, though the same river took everything away from us."

Another story was narrated by Jalal Majhi, who arrived in Dhaka six years ago from Mongla, a Southwestern coastal district. He did not lose his land but could no longer cultivate it after tidal waters intoxicated the soil. He now lives with his wife and youngest son and works as a rickshaw puller in Dhaka. His two other sons work at garment factories outside Dhaka and he can hardly manage any time to meet with them. He said, "My family was affected by river erosion. All our hopes and dreams have gone under the river waters." He also mentioned that farming and finding drinking water

from the reserve ponds, which is the only drinking water source. But things worsened during summer when these little ponds are dried up," he said. He finally added, "I love my locality, but I was compelled to migrate to the capital to lead a better life."

Laxmi Karmakar, who is about 70 years old, is another resident of the eroded Pussur River bank. Bended with the burden of her age, she said she was married to Binoy Majhi at 13. Her husband passed away 3 years ago due to a lack of proper medical treatment as well as shortage of money. Her husband owned approximately five acres of land on the shore of that river. Every year she has to relocate her house backward due to river erosion; presently, she has almost nothing except a small house. It seems that her house will be submerged by the river water very soon. The only earning member of her family is her stepson, who works as a day laborer as there is no other option. Laxmi stays with him and her grandchildren. In only 7-8 years, river erosion has left her family in dire straits.

Trishna Debi is a resident on the bank of Pussur River. She has five daughters but no son. All her daughters were married off one after another. Her husband Shoda



became difficult in his village due to sea level rise and coastal inundation. "Sometimes, people used to walk several kilometers to refill their drinking water pots

Nonda Majhi, is not alive. She lives in a tiny house built on others' land with one of her daughters, whose husband left her.

She goes fishing during high and low tides on the river bank and earns about fifty to eighty taka regularly. During the pandemic, her granddaughter, who was working in an NGO, became unemployed and was forced to manage household expenses with that small income. While talking about the recurring storms and cyclones, she was just crying. She mentioned that her household was destroyed due to erosion and tides over the last few years. She wept and said, "Now we have no land. We have turned into beggars. When clouds are in the sky, and the water level rises in the river, we must rush to the shelter center." A family close to her house, Komola Rani (35), is in the same situation. Shortly after 2-3 years of marriage, she started living with her husband Matin Sarker in their ancestral house. Life was comfortable with her only son and her old parents. But, every year, some of their property is washed away by the streams and waves of the Pussur River. The ongoing erosion of this river destroyed 4-5 acres of their land and left them in misery. The only thing that remains now is the tiny house; the river water touches it during the full moon because of the high tides.

Every year cyclones strike this local habitat in the Southwestern part of our

country. After 2020, three cyclones hit Mongla and the surrounding areas of Sundarban. The most recent was Cyclone Yaas, which hit on 26 May 2021. The alarming rise of water and the recurring hostility of cyclones threaten the future of around 20,000 families living in the ten villages on the banks of the Pussur River. People like Sukannya Rani, Laxmi Karmokar, Trishna Debi and Komola Rani from South Kanainagar's village faced the same fate. Losing everything in cyclones and river erosion, they are struggling with survival. According to Dr. Abdullah Harun Chowdhury, Chairman of the Department of Environmental Science Discipline, Khulna University, climate change is the main reason behind the natural disasters in this area. The sea absorbs most of the carbon gasses responsible for global warming and gets more heated responsible for producing frequent disasters. With such a loss of environmental equilibrium, nature is becoming hostile and causing increased natural disasters like cyclones and tornadoes.

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