

Cyclone Amphan and COVID-19: Double Challenge to the Coastal Fishers

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The whole world is under the catastrophic attack of COVID 19. The coronavirus outbreak quickly surges worldwide. Bangladesh has also been marked as an affected one. Government has taken various measures to mitigate the effects of corona in the economy and society as a whole.

Government warned of an impending global financial crisis due to the disruption of economic activity caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Some groups and sectors like coastal area are highly susceptible and vulnerable to the rapid social and economic effects of the COVID-19 epidemic.

In, coastal areas, fisheries are one of the primary sources of livelihood. Around half a million fisher folks earn their livelihood from the coastal region. The consequences upon coastal fisher have included complete shut-downs of some coastal fisheries, knock-on economic effects from market disruptions, increased health risks for fishers, processors and communities and have grown Illegal Unreported and Unregulated fishing.

Fishing season in BD coast is from October to April of the year. The fishing boat returned to the harbor with their catch in April. This year export was intermitted due to COVID 19. Bangladesh mainly exports ten categories of fishery products like

Frozen freshwater fish, frozen marine water fish, frozen shrimp, chilled fish, live fish, dry fish, salted dehydrate, live kuchia, live crab, and fish scale/shrimp scull to more than 55 countries. Bangladesh exported 68,655 tons of fishes and fisheries products worth about Tk 3,845 crore in the fiscal year 2018-19. It believed the same amount of damage had been occurred in the fisheries sector due to corona in this year.

In October, every year, thousands of fishers go for fishing in the Bay of Bengal. But going fishing in October this year is now completely uncertain amid COVID 19. During fishing, a large number of fishers will stay together, as sea fishing is a labour-intensive activity. Then the health security of this fisher, number of allowable fisher per boat, export condition of the future catch, everything is under uncertainty amid COVID 19. But all of those factors are directly linked with fishing.

While the country, especially this vulnerable coastal community was grappling with coronavirus pandemic, another catastrophe cyclone 'Amphan' was approaching towards Bangladesh as another danger. 'Amphan' turned into a very severe cyclonic storm on 20 May 2020 and entered into Bangladesh at evening with a wind speed of 150kmph and destructed 26 districts across the country. The communities that were affected most during the Cyclone are Satkhira, Patuakhali. Khulna, Barguna. Amphan is a 'crisis within a crisis' in the coastal area of Bangladesh.

During Amphan, the damages of agricultural land are about 1, 49000 hectors which have kept the farmers under severe long term poverty,

Cyclone Amphan damages 763 hectares of crops and 400 fish ponds in the char region of Bhola. The inundation of sweet water sources left them under imminent drinking water crisis; many people are now landless, homeless and even hopeless. Many fishers lost their fishing gears and equipment, fish seeds, aquaculture products during flash flooding, storm surges and heavy rain caused by the cyclone.

About 26 people lost their lives, 55,667 houses were completely damaged, and around 162,000 partially damaged, 150kms of protection embankments were washed away at 84 points in 13 districts, 200 bridges and culverts, and 100km of roads were fully damaged. Amphan in the middle of the corona, not only coastal people have lost their homes, but also they are under severe health risk. The coastal people are drowning between these two.

As October to April is a marine fishing season, the rest May to September the coastal fisher engaged themselves in other activities, mostly as day labour, some do freshwater aquaculture, poultry farming, and agriculture or go for others. The opportunity for people to work outside the home has been cut off by COVID 19. Even the option for freshwater aquaculture and agriculture have been destroyed by the cyclone Amphan. Many chingri gher have been washed away. At this moment, these proletarians can't come to the city to seek other jobs. In the middle of Corona, Amphan attack has made the coastal life constricted.

Bangladesh Government and different NGO's are conducting an awareness campaign in the coastal areas and ask local people to avoid social gathering,



maintain social distancing and stay at home. But when it comes to staying at home, there is nothing left in Amphan's attack.

Long term repair of these erosions while maintaining social distance has now become very urgent. Since corona is a far-reaching issue, it is essential to raise public awareness and ensure proper provision of food, clothing and shelter for those marginal people. Rapid test

facility for COVID 19 should be secured in the coastal area. Corona, as well as natural disaster, is now challenging for the country and the coastal people are at high risk. The Government needs to enrich the fisheries sector by ensuring health protection. Coastal livelihood is a prime consideration to enhance the marine economy of Bangladesh.

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