

The Livelihood of the Coastal Fishermen of Bangladesh is Under Severe Threat

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Frequent cyclones, depression, rising tidal waters, loss of navigability in nearby seas due to siltation, climate change, etc., are the contributing factors for enhancing the livelihood crises of coastal fishers in Bangladesh. Climate change and environmental crises have posed significant challenges to fishers' typical livelihoods. A large number of fishermen are being compelled to change careers. To make a living, many people have moved to the city.

Many coastal fishing communities believe that climate change is responsible for frequent natural disasters, which is a newly added challenge for their regular activities. On the other hand, imposing a fishing ban period by the Bangladesh government makes their lives difficult.

Woes of Coastal Fishermen

Nur Uddin, a 45-year-old fisherman from Bhola's Charfason Upazila, has spent his entire life fishing in the sea. Nur Uddin now realises that he can no longer go sea fishing like before due to numerous natural disasters. A few years back, there were only 2-3 cyclones or depressions in the rainy season, 'Nur Uddin claimed. 'Now, there are 2-3 more cyclones or depressions in the winter. The frequency of cyclones or depressions per year is very high and makes us defenceless'.

According to scientists, climate change causes more weather uncertainties. On the other hand, Fisherman Nur Uddin is utterly unaware of the concept of "climate change." He is, nevertheless, aware of the changes and their

implications for his life. Nur Uddin shared his experience that his fishing trawler returned to shore without any fish two months back due to two consecutive sea depressions. The story didn't stop here. They were sitting idle for nearly a month due to the rough sea. Storms also claimed the lives of many fishers on the coast of Bangladesh time and again. Seven fishermen from Mujibnagar union, Charfason Upazila, Bhola district, were killed in a storm two years back.

'I will not let my children allow for fishing till I am alive,' uttered Rokeya Begum, whose husband was a fisherman and died in the storm while fishing at sea. She also added, 'My son is also afraid of going to the sea for fishing. Presently, I can't afford meals three times a day, even though I work very hard to make my living. Whatever may be the case, I will not put my children's lives at risk by choosing the fishing as a profession'.

The increased number of storms in the Bay of Bengal has affected fishermen's livelihoods and other stakeholders dealing with sea fishing. 'Cyclone signals have been raised twice during my last trip for fishing', claimed Ershad Ali, a trawler owner. He also said, 'I used to finish a fishing expedition in ten days. The present situation allows me to fish for three or four days on a trip. On some trips, we don't get any fish.'

Fishermen also stated that they could not go for deep-sea fishing due to a lack of proper navigation equipment and modern fishing gear. Earlier, fishers used to cast their nets in the sea after sailing the trawler for 3-4 hours, but today they have to sail the trawler for 10-12 hours to cast their nets, squandering time and money.

Natural Disasters are a Regular Phenomenon for the Coastal Life

'We are insecure not only at sea but also at home. How are we supposed to



go to the cyclone shelter from our houses? Within two kilometres, there is no cyclone shelter. As a result, our risk of disaster has not decreased. Abdur Rab Mridha, 60, of Charlathimara village in Patharghata Upazila of Barguna district, made these comments. Rab Mridha and his family live in a perilous house on the riverbank outside the embankment, prone to flooding during high tide. Super cyclone Sidr struck his area in 2007, causing widespread devastation. He, like many others, had to float in the tidal waves that day, yet he is trying to lead a secure life.

Abdur Rob Mridha had already withstood five storms in addition to cyclone Sidr. However, cyclones were not a regular phenomenon in the past; now, we have cyclones every year. What is different now than before? Abdur Rab replied to the question, 'The river's depth has decreased due to siltation. Previously, large amounts of tidal water would not reach the dwelling, but now, water spreads to the residence even at low tide. Previously, mangroves provided protection, but the forest has shrunk in size. Rising temperature is also a primary concern responsible for

climate change. This climate change has a significant impact on livelihood as well I'm terrified of calamity now.'

'There is no possibility of getting shelter in times of calamity,' Abdur Rob Mridha claimed when discussing disaster management. 'When I hear the cyclone signal, my panic grows. Even though I am aware of the cyclone signal, I am unable to decide where to seek shelter due to the lack of a cyclone shelter in this area. An NGO just established a cyclone shelter, which is also far away from our house. Even at this distance, I won't be able to find a space to stand in that cyclone shelter.'

Mashuma Begum's Husband Went to the Sea and Never Returned

During the impact of cyclone Sidr in 2007, Mashuma Begum lost her husband; at that time, he was fishing in



the sea. The cyclone Sidr hit the area with great force, and many fishermen like her husband could not return to their homes. Mashuma Begum and her four small children were at a stake after her husband died. She grew her children by working as a day labourer in the streets and other people's homes, carrying a load of tragedy with her for the rest of her life.

Mashuma was describing the incident of the terrible night of cyclone Sidr. It had been raining all day with an unusual

increase in tidal water at night, so she took shelter in a close relative's house inside the embankment, but the water infiltrated there too. Fortunately, Mashuma Begum and her children survived. However, her husband, who went for fishing in the sea with other fishermen just two days before the Sidr did not return.

Mashuma Begum has now been fully aware of disaster management after the cyclone Sidr. The cyclone demolished her house. She later reconstructed that. This time she raised the ground floor of her house significantly. The house is approximately six feet above ground



level. Even still, if a large cyclone strikes, there is no way to safeguard the people of this region. The situation in this area has not improved much since Sidr's time,' Mashuma Begum added. 'When we hear the cyclone signal, we become terrified. The cyclone shelter is far away, and it is a school building.'

Fisherman Abdur Rahim is Looking for an Alternative Way of Earning

Many medium and small-scale fishermen in Patharghata are looking for alternate sources of income due to these frequent natural disasters. Abdur Rahim, a Padma village inhabitant, is one of them. He has been earning a living from fishing with his nets and boats for many years. At one point, he realised that fishing was more harmful than profit, and because of that, he emphasised and started agricultural

cultivation on the land. He found that if there were a loss in fishing, it could not make up like agriculture. However, there is another stumbling block: extreme salinity may ruin his crops. After being motivated by an NGO, he eventually began cultivating using a different method to minimise salinity. Abdur Rahim has shifted his concentration away from fishing and toward agriculture.

Abdur Rahim has found a way to prevent the disaster, and many villagers

have joined him. 'Natural disasters have brought many changes in our lives, such as fishes are not being found in the sea or rivers like they used to be,' Abdur Rahim said. 'Those disasters are all around us, and we must adapt and discover new methods to make a livelihood.'

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