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***Monga* and Women: A Case Study from Gaibandha District of Bangladesh**

Fatema R. Jahan

Abstract

This paper looks at how local women understand and cope with *monga* and attempt to shape the government's *monga* mitigation policy. *Monga* is often defined by scholars and policy-makers as seasonal, periodic famine. That is, it is a time of special food and economic crisis that occurs annually. In contrast, this study defines *monga* as *obhab* or chronic poverty that exists throughout the year. In other words, it does not confine *monga* to a specific time period. This conceptualization of *monga* can help change its mitigation policies that currently centers largely on "relief" for a limited period. The paper argues for a holistic program that runs throughout the entire year. The paper also shows that while *monga* affects everyone in the area, women and female-headed households suffer the most. However, the women have developed their own coping mechanisms. The paper finally recommends greater attention to some of these coping mechanisms in order to strengthen the *monga* mitigation process.

Introduction

Monga, a phenomenon prevalent mainly in the northern region of Bangladesh, has received a great deal of media attention in recent years because of the loss of human life associated with it.¹ *Monga* carries along with it extreme poverty, hunger and starvation, malnutrition, diseases, and often death (Elahi and Ara, 2007, 2008). A study undertaken by the Power and Participation Research Centre shows that, in the area affected by *monga*, a total of 188,181 households suffered from chronic food deficit; 334,265 households had seasonally unemployed agri-laborers; 8,093 households suffered from river erosion; 357,075 households had marginal producers of risk-prone regional pockets; and 139,141 households were landless in four districts (Rahman, 1995a, 1995b). According to a 2006 survey of 425,000 families in the *monga* zone by Palli Karma Shahayak Foundation, about 20 percent had no choice but to sell their assets and property to feed their families, while 40 percent had to migrate to other places for work.²

In summary, *monga* contributes to extreme poverty in northern Bangladesh. When it occurs, it affects all sections of society. However, women and female-headed households fare the worst because they already tend to be more malnourished, partly for existing socio-cultural reasons and because when there is an oversupply of day-labor, employers tend to hire men before women. It is against this backdrop that the present study aims to look at the implications of *monga* on women.

Rationale of the Study

Monga is an important part of an environment of

widespread poverty in northern Bangladesh. As such, *monga* mitigation has been identified as a key component in any national poverty reduction strategy (Rahman, 1995a). It has also been considered a relatively recent disaster (Elahi & Ara, 2008). Although it has attracted academic attention in the past few years, several studies have already been conducted on *monga*. However, few of them have incorporated women's concerns and issues. In contrast, this study explores the experiences of women, thus offering a gendered perspective on *monga*.

Objective of the Study

The study addresses the following objectives:

- To scrutinize the impact of *monga* on women
- To examine the underlying causes of *monga*, and
- To find out ways of mitigating *monga* by exploring the coping mechanisms of women.

Operational Definition of the Concept

Monga is a local term used to describe a famine-like situation in which the poor suffer acute deprivation caused by their lack of purchasing power, itself the result of the seasonal scarcity of gainful employment (RDRS, 2007). The word *monga* derives from another local word "*magan*" which means "to ask for alms" or "to beg" (Alam, 2008). Unlike the existing scholarship which defines *monga* from a time perspective, i.e. from mid-September to mid-November, the present paper defines it as chronic *obhab* (or *desperation*), synonymous with poverty that exists throughout the year.

Methodology

The present research adopts qualitative methods. It can be considered as feminist research in the sense that it was conducted from women's experience. The fieldwork was carried out with the help of one local NGO (Gono Unnayan Kendro or GUK). Data were collected through the following research techniques: a) Focus group discussion (FGD): I conducted three FGDs that consisted of thirty women and seven men. Through the FGDs, I gained the basic information about the respondents and their experience of surviving against *monga*; b) Case studies: Ten case studies are selected out of the women who participated in FGDs. The data for case studies were collected mainly through interview method. Each interview was one-to-one, in-depth, and semi-structured; and c) *participant observation*: Although participant observation is usually undertaken over an extended period of time, one month was the duration for this study due to limitations of time and budget.

The study was conducted in Gaibandha district for several reasons. First, it is one of the worst *monga*-prone area, and second, because of familiarity with and accessibility to this district. In Gaibandha, *monga* prevails both in the mainland and in the *char*³ area, the strip of sandy land that rises out of a river bed, however, I selected the *char* areas instead of the mainland because *monga* is more severe in the disaster-prone *char* areas. The two *chars* selected for this study, Rashulpur *char* and Kuderpara *char*, are located in Gaibandha Sadar Upazila.

The Chars Under Study

A Profile of the Study Area

Location

The selected two *chars* are situated in Gaibandha Sadar Upazila under Gaibandha district of Bangladesh. Both *chars* are situated on the bank of Brahmaputra River.⁴

Total Area and Population Size

Rashulpur *char* is quite small in terms of area and population size in comparison with Kuderpara *char*. Rashulpur *char* consists of an area of 2 kilometer, while Kuderpara *char* is an area of 5.5 km. Again, there are about 100 households living in Rashulpur *char* and on the other hand, a number of 230 households live in Kuderpara *char*.

Land Ownership Pattern

The land ownership pattern is quite different in *char* area from the mainland. Most of the land in *char* is either *khas* land⁵ or belongs to rich people who do not live on a *char*. To live on a *khas* land, the dwellers need not pay. The *chars* are prone to flood and riverbank erosion. Therefore, the whole *char* including the dweller's house and lands can be submerged at anytime. This is the reason why there is no permanent ownership of land in *char* area and why land is so cheap at *char* area. The dwellers buy land from a wealthy person for three or four years. If the land is not drowned within 5 or 6 years, the owner will come again to claim more money for the next few years. Most of the dwellers are illiterate and as such none of them go through any registration i.e. they have no document to prove that they bought the land from the owners. Therefore, they are often harassed by the previous owners or individuals pretending to be owners.

Urban Facilities

The *char* areas are deprived of urban amenities such as electricity. The dwellers use *kupi* or an oil lamp during the night. All the facilities including shops, hospital, school, colleges, and markets are situated on the opposite side of the river. The dwellers have to ferry the river daily in order to have access to them. There is not even a graveyard in Rashulpur *char*. (There had once been a graveyard but that yard was submerged during a flood). Therefore, if anyone dies, the deceased's family has to ferry the dead body to bury it in the graveyard on the opposite bank of the river.

A Profile of the Respondents

Age Structure

The age of the female respondents ranged between 20 to 60 years. However, the highest number of *char* dwellers, irrespective of gender, are from the younger end of the spectrum.

Marital Status

Most of the female respondents are married. A few are either widowed or abandoned.

Literacy Rate

One of the depressing features of the *char* area is that most of the dwellers, both male and female, are

illiterate (Figure-1). Recently, the women who are associated with different cooperatives have been learning to sign their name. The literacy rate is increasing among the present generation, especially among women, due to the establishment of some NGO-affiliated primary schools and high schools in the *char* areas.

Occupational Structure

The *char* dwellers have a flexible occupational structure and it varies from season to season (Table-1, Figure-2). The male who is an agricultural laborer also does the earth work depending on the availability of the employment. Every male *char* dweller seasonally migrates to different parts of the country in search of work. Two main occupations of the dwellers, irrespective of gender, are agricultural labor and earth work. In December, men typically do earth work as laborers. In *Jousto* and *Ashar* month, which is the harvesting period of Irri paddy, they work as agricultural laborer. When there is no work, they migrate to other places. The female *char* dwellers are engaged in multiple tasks such as household work, livestock rearing, kitchen gardening etc. They also do the earth work together with the males if available.

Income Pattern

As there is no fixed occupation for the dwellers, there is no fixed income either. The income pattern fluctuates with the changing pattern of work. However, there is a marked gap in the wages of men and women. Women are paid less than men. While a male agricultural laborer is paid Tk. 100-120 a day plus three meals, his female counterpart gets only Tk. 60-80 taka plus three times meals. The income gap is similar for earth work.

Life in the Char Areas

Nomadic Life

The *char* dwellers lead a nomadic life. They stay at one *char* for some years. When the *char* is submerged as a result of flood or riverbank erosion, they come to the embankment of the river. Then they stay there for a few years. They return to their original *char* when it rises again or search for another *char*. Although life on a *char* is very uncertain, these dwellers prefer living there because of the lower cost of living compared to life on the mainland.

Food Habits

There are two types of people living on the *chars*:

Bangals, who belong to the west or mainland but come to the *char* due to poverty, and *bhati* or the original *char* dwellers, whose lives are spent moving from *char* to *char*. These two groups have different food habit and cultures. The *bhati* people are seen to be physically strong, able to work hard with a lower food consumption. Unlike the Bangals, they eat a variety of food and are not totally dependent on rice. During the *monga* period, they survive by eating potato, *cown*, *china*, sweet potato etc. They usually eat twice a day. In the morning, they eat *panta bhat* (stale rice fermented by being left covered with water overnight) with *aloo bharta* (mashed potatoes mixed with oil and spices), and at night, they eat rice with curry. Sometimes men who do earth work eat also at noon but women usually go hungry at that time. For the Bangal people, the staple food is rice. They are considered physically weaker and as consuming a smaller variety of food. *Char*-dwellers usually plant and eat a special kind of rice, locally known as *gainja dhan*, which is well-suited to that environment. Women usually cook with a *chula*, a mud-stove, and use jute stalks, dried cow dung, and husks of grain as fuel.

Early Marriage

Most of the female *char* dwellers are married off before puberty. The average age of marriage for women is 12 years. Early marriage is a direct cause of low literacy as well as the miserable condition of the female dwellers. However, the situation is gradually changing with increased literacy rates and consciousness among both male and female *char* dwellers.

Population Density

The population density is very high in the *char* area and this is one of the main reasons for the persistent poverty among the dwellers. A woman has an average of three children and the average family size in the *char* area is five. Prevalent superstitions pertaining to children birth contribute to the high birth rate, e.g., "A person who has only a male child or only a female child cannot prosper in life." So women who have children of only one sex are pressured into additional pregnancies.

Dowry

Dowry is a common practice in the *char*. There is a trend that females cannot be married off without paying dowry. The dowry puts an extra burden on these poor people. There are some cases of violence to dowry.

Figure-1: Literacy rate among the female respondents

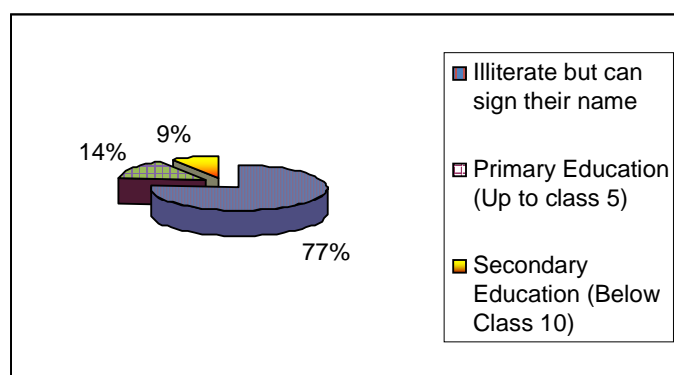
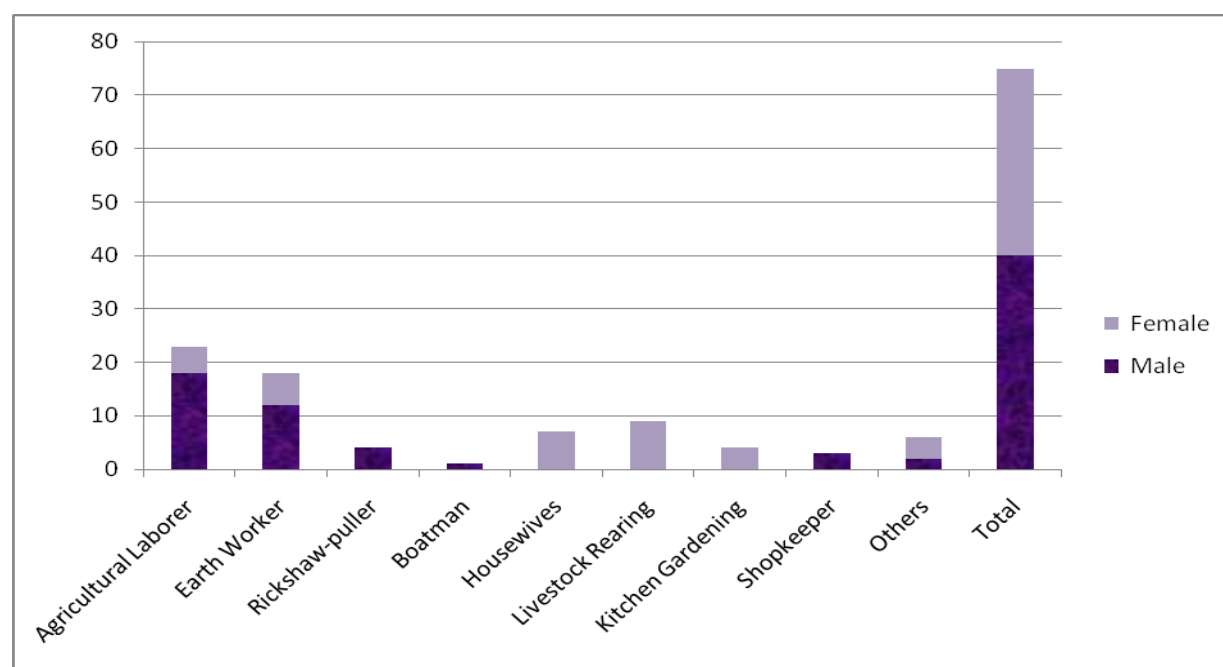


Table-1: Occupational Pattern According to Gender

Category	No of Female	Percentage of Female	No of Male	Percentage of Male
Agricultural Laborer	5	14.28%	18	45%
Earth Worker	6	17.14%	12	30%
Rickshaw-puller	0	0%	4	10%
Boatman	0	0%	1	2.5%
Housewives	7	20%	0	0%
Livestock Rearing	9	25.71%	0	0%
Kitchen Gardening	4	11.42%	0	0%
Shopkeeper	0	0%	3	7.5%
Others	4	11.42%	2	5%
Total	35	100%	40	40%

Figure-2: Occupational Pattern according to Gender



Monga and Women

Redefining Monga

The women under this study experienced *monga* in their own lives. Therefore, I argue, they have a better understanding of the term than the theorists and academicians. They identify *monga* as *akal* or *obhab*, the scarcity of supplies necessary for survival, including food and water. According to the female *char* dwellers, scarcity results from the absence of employment opportunities along with the rising price of necessities. They blame the government for raising prices and causing *monga*. They also argue that *monga* or *obhab* does not exist only for a short period; rather, it is something they experience throughout the year.

Causes of Monga

Riverbank Erosion

Respondents identify riverbank erosion as one of the main causes behind the *monga*. It occurs throughout the year; during the flood season as well as the dry season. None of the *char* dwellers visit their birthplace because it is under water. They have lost their land and assets due to river erosion and flood, and are forced to migrate either to the embankments

or to another *char*. One interviewee said, “The river is rising and we are prepared to migrate to another place. We can hear the sound of the bank slumping from our room!” When the *char* rises again, they return. It is like a cycle and, through this cycle, they become poorer from one generation to the next. (Figure-3)

Flood

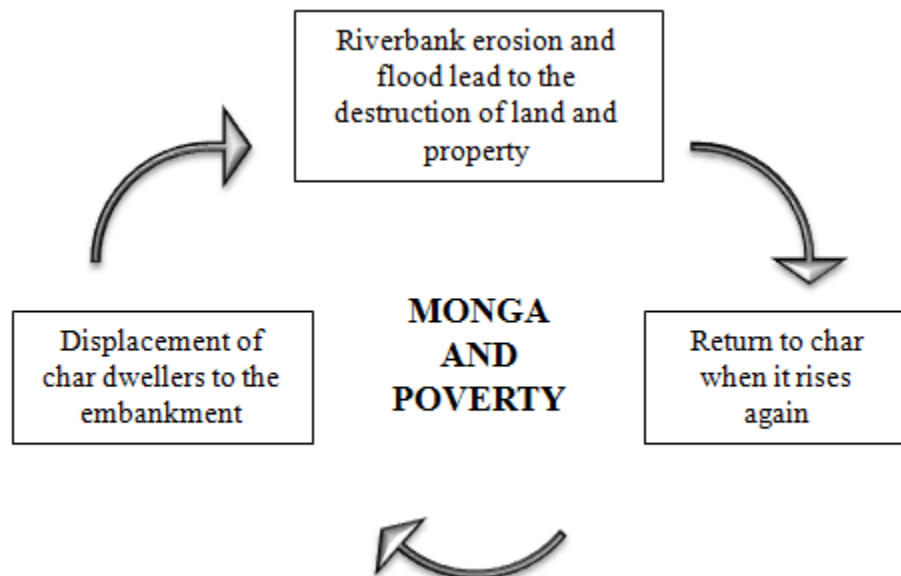
Flood is another main factor that leads to *monga*. According to the respondents, their worst time is during the floods because they cannot go in search of work. The effect of flood is devastating in the *char* area, eroding agricultural land, and ruining the whole family. One respondent’s family lost 21 bighas of land in three floods.⁶

Climate Change

Climate change has become a curse for the *char* dwellers. The frequency of the floods and other disasters have increased as a result of climate change.

The dwellers said, “Climate change is hindering our success. We cannot do much just by being conscious if the climate continues to change.” They described that every year grain fields are destroyed by floods

Figure-3: The Cycle of Monga and Poverty



while the vegetable plants don't get enough water in the winter, and they survive only with the income from earth work. One respondent said, "If flood occurs three or four times a year, how can we possibly emerge from poverty?" Indeed, one year flooding had occurred three times. One respondent had planted a crop of aman seeds and about 56 kilograms of aman seeds were destroyed in the third flood.

Price Hike of Daily Necessities

The poor *char* inhabitants cannot cope with the increasing prices of daily necessities. Their wages are at par with price increases, so this has posed an additional burden on them.

Poor Communication System

The communication system is very poor in the *char* areas. Although the main and only transport system in the area is by boat, it is not available throughout the year. As a result, the *char* dwellers often remain isolated from the mainland. This means that the *char* inhabitants cannot go to the mainland in search of work and also that relief and aid assistance does not reach the *char* area from the mainland. The inhabitants often have to wait hours on the riverbank to cross the river. Therefore, the *char* areas lag far behind other areas in terms of social and economic development.

Lack of Access to Non-agricultural Work

The *char* dwellers depend largely on the agricultural sector. There is no industry in the *char* area and the local population has no training in any area other than agricultural and earth work. This means that when there is no agricultural work, they remain unemployed.

The Impact of Monga on Women

Monga affects women differently and more severely than men. The consequences of *monga* on women are as follows:

Overburdened

During the period of employment crisis, the male *char* dwellers migrate to different regions in search of work, leaving the women behind with the responsibility of the whole family. In the absence of men, women are overburdened with work. They have to play a dual role, that of both man and woman.

Insecurity

The female inhabitants' lives are full of insecurities, uncertainties and anxieties. They have no fixed occupational pattern, no fixed income, and, unlike rural women who do not live on *chars*, have no fixed home. If the *char* is submerged due to flooding or river erosion, they have to move to another place. As women's lives are closely associated with their children, they are more vulnerable than men. This is especially true of women who do not have the support of a male breadwinner.

Persistent Indebtedness

During any crisis period or in the absence of a male breadwinner, women often survive by taking loans, either from an NGO-affiliated cooperative or a local moneylender, often known as *mahajon*. They repay the loan with their income throughout the rest of the year. Once the loan is repaid, they take out another loan. Sometimes they take a new loan simply in order to repay an older loan. As a result, they are trapped into a persistent cycle of indebtedness all year.

Chronic Poverty

One of the depressing features of the *char* area is the chronic poverty of women. Although the dwellers struggle hard, their situation does not improve. Women are the poorest and suffer the most: first, because like men on the disaster-prone *char*, their lives are already precarious, and second, because of gender-based discrimination they earn lower wages for comparable work.

Effect on Reproductive Health

The burdens of work and loan repayments, and the anxieties associated with these pressures ultimately have a negative impact on women's health, especially on their reproductive health. Pregnant women have to do as much work as women who are not pregnant. Women are responsible for giving birth to an expected number of children. They also have to bear the burden of using contraceptive methods, many of which are accompanied by severe complications. Some of the respondents have infections in their reproductive organs but they rarely visit a doctor due to the unavailability of medical service on the *char* and their inability to afford to visit a doctor away from the *char*. And they have no access to roving field hospitals because there are none.

Coping with Monga

Women have developed their own strategies for coping with the devastating effects of *monga*. These include:

Kitchen Gardens

With responsibility for their families' daily food consumption, most female *char* dwellers have established kitchen gardens. They grow *lal shak*, gourd, radish, etc. in the garden. Therefore, not only do they not have to buy vegetables, but they can often sell the surplus vegetables in the weekly market. Through their work of kitchen gardening and livestock rearing, they help their family to survive during any crisis period, as well as the rest of the year.

Reduced Food Consumption

Women consume less food in order to save for her children. One respondent said that when her husband goes to Dhaka, she can save some money simply by consuming less. She said, "Men extend the family budget. They spend more on fish and other food. We women spend less on food."

Food Processing

The female *char* dwellers usually store processed food grains throughout the year. There are some particular crops that are planted only on the *char* such as *cown*, *china*, etc. *Cown* and *china* can be cultivated with small amounts of fertilizer and water and that is why the *char* dwellers plant them. They boil *cown*, *china*, pulses, and other food grains until fairly dry, then smash them before storing them. That way, during any disaster period, they only need to add water to cook them. Also, when processing food grains, women make efficient use of the waste produced: they use the husk either as fuel or as animal fodder.

Seasonal Migration

This is a strategy used by men but has enormous implications for the lives of *char* women. The most common coping strategy among the male *char* dwellers is seasonal migration to different parts of the country in search of work during the period of employment crisis. Typically, men migrate to places like Dhaka, Comilla, Munshiganj, Chittagong, and Bikrampur once or twice a year in search of employment. They stay there for one or two months and then come back to the *char*. As a seasonal migrant, they usually do earth work, agricultural

labor, or rickshaw-pulling. They know what work is available where and when and try to plan accordingly. For example, they go to Narayanganj during potato season. As seasonal workers, they are paid Tk. 150-200 per day. They get paid far less locally so they are quite dependent on these opportunities. As one respondent put it, "We cannot survive with the work and income available in this area."

The Adhi Culture

The dwellers practice a system for their living, known as *adhi* which means half. It is practiced in the case of crops as well as domestic animals. In the case of grains, a local family basically rents a piece of land from its owner; they cultivate it, and harvest the crop and give half of the crop to the owner as rent payment and keep the other half for themselves. In the case of domestic animals, they borrow, for example, a calf from a wealthy person, take care of the calf for a few years, and return it to the owner when it is a mature cow. If the cow produces a calf while with the borrower, it becomes the property of the borrower and will not be returned along with its mother. The owner gets a full grown cow instead of a calf while the borrower gets a calf instead of nothing. So both sides benefit and profits are halved between the borrower and owner in this *adhi* system.

Employment Opportunities Provided by the Local NGOs

Recently some local NGOs have started providing employment opportunities in the *char* areas. Two local NGOs are active in the *chars* under study: GUK and Lifebuoy Friendship Company. These two organizations have provided earth work to both the male and female *char* dwellers under their Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP) project. Through their involvement with the NGOs, the dwellers not only earn money, but are also able to raise their homestead plinth so that their homes will not be submerged by flood waters.

Loan Culture

The dwellers survive by taking loans either from a wealthier person who is often known as a *mahajon*, or from any NGO affiliated *samity*.⁷ When men migrate, women survive by taking loans. They locally call it *hawlat neya*.⁸ They borrow not only money, but also food grains such as paddy from the neighbors. If they borrow grain, they will have to give back only the grain. But if they loan money, they will have to repay it with interest. In case of

loans from *mahajon*, the interest rate is very high, i.e., Tk. 20 a month per every Tk. 100. This type of loan is usually used for food consumption.

On the other hand, if they take a loan from an NGO *samity*, they are required to pay relatively lower interest. For example, the interest rate of GUK is 6% i.e. Tk. 60 taka per 1000 per year. This type of loan is usually used for creating self-employment. However, the credit schemes of NGOs are not available to all *chars*, such as in Rashulpur *char*. People there survive by taking loan from the *mahajon* with a high interest rate. One of the depressing features of this loan culture is that although the loan is given to women by the NGOs for their self-employment as well as empowerment, it is often used in wrong ways. In the case of one respondent, she took loan for her shop but spent it on dowry for her grand-daughter's marriage.

Relief

According to the respondents, they have very little access to relief. They hardly get any government assistance. Some respondents complain that to gain access to VGF cards or other government relief requires bribing the local members and the chairmen.

Disaster Management

Recently, the local NGOs began providing the dwellers training on how to save their resources from being destroyed during any disaster. Now the dwellers take necessary preparation before the advent of any disaster, such as raising the homestead plinth, storing fodder and dry food, etc.

Redefining the Monga Mitigation Policy

For the most part, *monga* is defined as the famine-like situation which occurs due to the seasonal scarcity of employment and/or of food. This narrow definition of *monga* largely confines *monga* mitigation activities to a time frame. For example, the government programs on *monga* mitigation primarily center on 'relief' which run for a certain period. However, the *monga* affected women define *monga* as '*ovab*' or poverty which exists throughout the year. Therefore, the *monga* mitigation policy must incorporate activities that can be run throughout the entire year. Second, the underlying causes of *monga* are not limited to lack of employment or food. In fact, supply of adequate employment opportunities and sufficient food can even lead to *monga* situation in the presence of river erosion, flood, climate change, price hikes and poor communication

systems. In this context, *monga* mitigation requires a holistic approach which not only require government support, but also regional cooperation, to fight flood and climate change. Third, the female *char* dwellers have developed some notable mechanisms to cope with *monga* through vegetable cultivation and *adhi* culture. On the other hand, some of their coping mechanisms such as reduced food consumption can badly affect their reproductive health.

As mentioned earlier, NGOs have played a very important role in these women's lives by providing them with some employment opportunities through the Chars Livelihood Programme (CLP). Also, there have been positive changes in the dwellers' lives through *monga* mitigation programs. This is true especially in the case of women. For example, the female literacy rate has increased remarkably in the last few years. Women have learned to sign their names after joining the cooperatives. They have begun attending the cooperative meetings and have built a strong network of cooperation. There also has been a positive change in their awareness levels. The women seem to be more conscious than men about different issues such as gender, *monga*, disaster management, etc. The *monga* mitigation program has also produced some success stories. The female respondents have started to speak in public and they display greater confidence and courage. Above all, these programs have effected some important changes in gender roles and the gender division of labor in the *char* area. However, the NGOs and the government have not been completely successful in combating *monga*. The loan provided by the NGOs often cannot help women get rid of poverty. On the contrary, it traps the women in the persistent cycle of a loan culture which further increases their insecurity. Therefore, providing loan to the women must go hand in hand with providing them with gainful employment opportunities.

Conclusion

Monga, a phenomenon prevalent mainly in the northern region of Bangladesh, has been reported prominently in the media in recent years due to the loss of human life involved. When *monga* occurs, it affects all sections of people. However, women and lone-mother households fare the worst. The present study has sought to examine how female *char* dwellers understand and cope with *monga*. From this local perspective, the paper has attempted to contribute to improving the government's *monga* mitigation policy. While existing scholarship defines *monga* as time-bound, i.e., from mid-September to mid-November, the present paper follows the lead of

the female respondents in identifying *monga* as *obhab* or chronic poverty that persists throughout the year. This conceptualization of *monga* can change the government policy on *monga* mitigation which currently centers on short-term “relief” efforts.

According to the char dwellers interviewed in this study, the main causes of *monga* are river erosion, flood, climate change, and the rising cost of necessities. But current NGO and government policy is formulated on the assumption that the main causes are lack of employment and food. Given the findings of the present study, *monga* mitigation requires a holistic approach that not only asks for government support but also for regional cooperation to alleviate flooding and climate change.

The paper has also argued that *monga* has a gendered impact, affecting women differently and more severely than it does men. When the male *char* dwellers migrate to different regions in search of work, women are left behind and are overburdened with work. The female inhabitants’ lives are full of insecurities, uncertainties and anxieties. They have no fixed occupational pattern, no fixed income, and indeed, no fixed home. This is especially true of the abandoned wives and widows.

In the absence of male breadwinners, many women survive by taking loans, and often fund themselves trapped in long-term indebtedness. Among the poorer section of the *char*, women suffer the most by virtue, first, of being a dweller in the disaster-prone *char* area, and, second, from gender discrimination in the limited employment opportunities that are available. Women also suffer from the mental pressures associated with arduous work and indebtedness, leading to negative impacts on their health, especially their reproductive health.

Over the years, however, women have developed their own coping mechanisms for dealing with *monga* and these have been discussed in this paper. While the paper recommends that some of the coping mechanisms be recognized and considered in government and NGO policy, the point is not to romanticize or even encourage some of these coping mechanisms. For example, in the long run, reduced food consumption can badly affect women’s reproductive health. Finally, the paper has critically analyzed the role of NGOs in mitigating *monga* in the *char* areas. The *monga* mitigation program has brought many positive changes discussed earlier. But as many scholars have shown in other contexts, NGOs play a contradictory role through their credit schemes that often trap the women in the persistent

cycle of a loan culture. Therefore, providing loans to the women must go hand in hand with providing them with employment opportunities.

Recommendations

The recommendations for mitigating *monga* are suggested by the respondents as well as by the NGO personnel.

- *Monga* cannot be mitigated with only one program. Providing employment to people will not automatically change their status. They must have the capacity to retain it. Enhancing their capacity also will not change their status until they are empowered to decide whether they will work or not or where they will work. So an integrated approach is needed for mitigating *monga*.⁹
- Different *monga* mitigation programs should be undertaken for different areas. In other words, a local perspective should be emphasized while planning a *monga* mitigation program.
- River erosion must be controlled and it cannot be done without the cooperation of the government. Dialogue with the neighboring countries at the regional level can be helpful in this perspective.¹⁰ Other disasters, such as flood and drought have to be regulated through adequate measures.
- Continuous dialogue must be held on climate change at the local, national, regional and international levels. This problem cannot be solved without the cooperation of the richer countries.
- An accountable government must be insured to reduce the level of corruption at the local level in distributing VGF cards and other relief during the disaster period.
- The char dwellers must be trained on disaster management so that they can safeguard their assets from being destroyed during any disaster.
- The prices of daily necessary products must be better controlled and the government is accountable for this task.
- The *char* dwellers should be provided with the type of work that will help them prosper. If they are just given money, they will spend it in on food consumption. But if they are given something productive, cows for example, they themselves

- will create a way of self-employment and a way of earning money.¹¹
- The communication and transport system in the *char* area must be developed. A bridge can be built on the river between the mainland and the *char* and a mobile phone network can be created there.
- Non-farm industries may be established in the *char* area.
- The capacity of the people may be enhanced by increasing their mobility and awareness and by providing them with training on different non-agricultural work.
- The literacy rate ought to be enhanced, especially the female literacy rate in the *char* area.¹²
- Home-based employment opportunities for women could be encouraged such as weaving, mat-making, etc.
- Enhanced awareness is needed on population control, dowry, and women's rights in the *char* area.
- Train farmers to change the cropping patterns by adopting crop diversification in the *monga*-prone areas.

Endnotes

1. See also www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=80723 - 58k
2. See also www.irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=80723 - 58k
3. *Char* refers to the strip of sandy land rising out of a river bed
4. The Bramhaputra river is also named as Jamuna river at some crossing points of the river.
5. *Khas* land is a land which belong to the government
6. One bigha is equivalent to 20 Kathas/ 0.13378 hectare, One hectare is equivalent to 2.4710 acres/7.4749 bigha, One acre is equivalent to

3bigha/ 60 katha/ 0.404 hectare and One katha is equivalent to 720 sq feet/66.91 sq meters

7. *Samity* is a local term which stands for association or cooperative
8. *Hawlat neya* is a local term which means borrowing something
9. This point was raised by Abdus Salam, the Director of GUK
10. This was recommended by one of the female respondents.
11. This was pointed out by one of the female respondents.
12. This issue was raised by one of the female respondents.

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