



Introduction

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Introduction

Haor people in Bangladesh are facing many problems. In terms of mainstream socio-economic development initiatives, they are becoming increasingly marginalized. The constitution of the republic of Bangladesh has pledged a special attention to the disadvantaged community such as the Haor people, but they are yet to enjoy the full access to the essential services by the government. Given the special features in Haor areas, an effective coordination between government and NGOs is needed to ensure the rights to essential services of the Haor people. This study report is based on the participatory research findings in two Upazillas in Kishoreganj district. The title of the study is **“Essential Services of Haor Areas and Way Forward.”** The findings of the report portray a shocking picture of essential services in Haor areas in Bangladesh. The people in the Haor areas have no or little access to the basic services in compare to that of the people in the mainland. This report has four sections. First section presents a general discussion on Char/Haor areas in Bangladesh in relation to essential services. In the second section, in line with the research objectives, the methodology of the study was stated. Third section deals with the state of basic services in Haor areas in general and Kishoreganj district in particular. This section also provides a brief summary of the essential services providers by the NGOs in Haor areas in Kishoreganj district. By highlighting the problems and loopholes in the government supported essential services, some recommendations were also made at the last section.

Section-1

1.1 Defining the Haor

“A Haor is a wetland in the North Eastern part of Bangladesh which physically is a bowl shaped shallow depression. It is a mosaic of wetland habitats including rivers, streams and irrigation canals, large areas of seasonally flooded cultivated plains and hundreds of haors and beels.” (Hussain & Salam 2007: 3)

Large areas of Sylhet, Maymensingh, Sunamganj, Habiganj, Maulvi Bazar, Kishoreganj and Netrokona districts are covered by many Haors. Haors are very resourceful. It is an internationally important ecosystem. Haors and beels support major subsistence and commercial fisheries and have become an important geographical area for boro cultivation of the country. Field observation also suggests that apart from the immediate economic benefits, the landscape of Haor areas can also be a very attractive location for tourism. Long-term planning from the government or the private sector can also turn these landscapes into an attractive tourist spot.

The total area of Haor type wetland ecosystem in Bangladesh is 8 million hectares. It includes about 47 major Haors and 6300 beels of varying size of which about 3500 are permanent and 2800 are seasonal.” (Hussain & Salam 2007: 3).

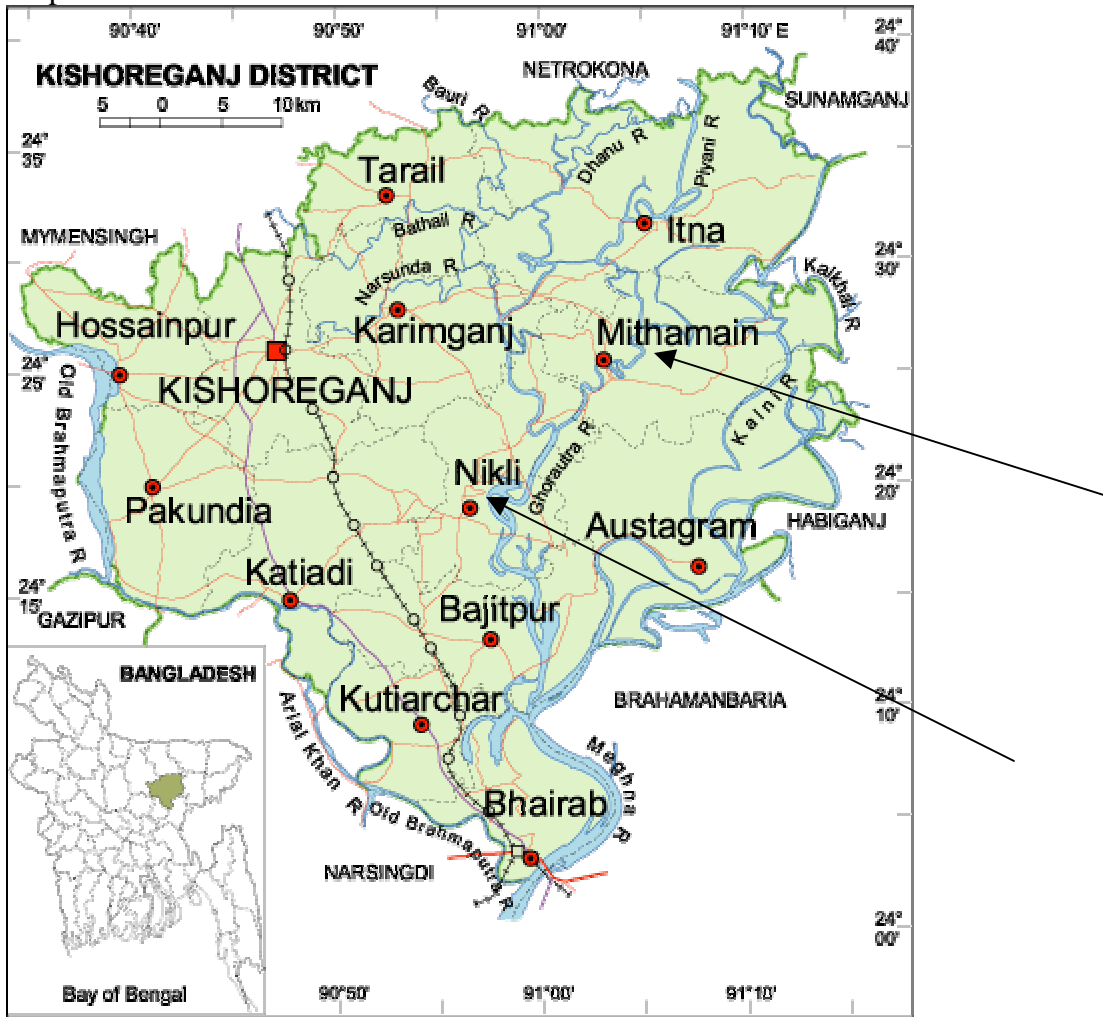
1.2 Locations of Haors in Bangladesh

<i>District</i>	<i>Upazila</i>
Sunamganj	Sunamganj Sadar, Jagannathpur, Dharmapasha, Jamalganj, Chhatak, Derai, Salla, Tahirpur, Bishambarpur
Netrokona	Atpara, Barhatta, khaliajuri, Mohongonj, Madan, Kandua
Sylhet	Jaintiapur, Beanibazar, Fenchuganj, Balagonj, Biswanath
Hobiganj	Ajmerigonj, Hobiganj Sadar, Bahubal
Maulavi Bazar	Malivi Bazar Sadar, Kulaura, Rajnagar, Sreemangal
Kishoreganj	Mithamain, Karimgonj, Austragram, Itna, Nikli, Bazitpur, Kuliarchar, Tarail, Bhairab, Katiadi
Bhramanbaria	Bhramanbaria Sadar, Nasirnagar

Source: Banglapedia (2003)

Following is the district-wise distribution of prominent Haors in Bangladesh. It may be mentioned here that in some districts, Haor are also known as beels. The participatory research took place in two Haor Upazillas (Nikli and Mithmoin) under Kishoreganj district.

Map-2



Kishoreganj: Mithamain, Austragram, Itna, Nikli, Bazitpur
Kuliarchar, Tarail, Bhairab, Pakundia, Katiadi

1.3 Defining the Concept of Basic Service

Generally, basic services include the people right to food, education, health, shelter, employment and other recreational activities. The governments of any country are required to provide these basic services to its citizens. Unfortunately, citizens in many underdeveloped and developing countries are deprived of those basic services. And Bangladesh is no exception. A definition by the Oxfam-GB is worth mentioning here.

“Oxfam defines Basic Rights as morally justified claims to certain rights. Oxfam believes that everyone has a basic right to have enough to eat; clean water; a

livelihood; a home; education; health care; a safe environment; protection from violence; equality of opportunity; and a say in their future. These rights are enshrined in a number of international human rights agreements, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, and the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. Basic rights are the main focus of Oxfam's Campaign” (Oxfam-GB definition on Basic Service cited in Hussain & Salam 2007).

In Bangladesh, all citizens are entitled to have the basic services from the government. This is their constitutional right. It is worth to revisit the pertinent article from the constitution of the Republic of Bangladesh.

1.4 Constitutional Provisions

The following articles from the Constitution of the Peoples Republic of Bangladesh can be referred.

The state shall provide facilities to meet fundamental needs of the citizens and the state will deliver basic services to the people through service providing departments of the government. (Article 15)

In addition, Bangladesh has ratified the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the United Nation Organization (UNO) (Article 25 A & B).

The state shall adopt effective measures to remove social and economic inequality among the citizens and to ensure equitable distribution of wealth among the citizens and of opportunities in order to attain a uniform level of economic development throughout the republic. [Article 19(2)]

Nothing in this article shall prevent the state from making special provision in favor of women or children or for the advancement of any backward section of citizens [Article 28(4)].

1.5 Haor at Policy Level

People living in Haor/char areas can be considered as “backward section of citizens.” The living conditions and life opportunities of the Haor people are not as equal as to those living in the mainland. Due to the unique geographical locations, people in Haor areas are more vulnerable to frequent natural disasters. This vulnerability significantly curtails their capacity to fulfill their basic needs. To increase their life chances in the mainstream societies, the government of Bangladesh is yet to take any coordinated plan of actions for the Haor people. Although the constitution of the country allows the government to provide a special policy consideration, the government of Bangladesh is yet to offer that. In terms of essential services, Haor people are the least recipients. It is very important that the government of the Republic of Bangladesh pays immediate attention to the needs of these people and provides them the necessary essential services that they are entitled to.

1.6 Bangladesh Hoar and Wetlands Development Board (BHWDB)

Since its inception, Bangladesh Hoar and Wetland Development Board (BHWDB), has failed to prove its effectiveness. Unfortunately, it has become an ineffective board so far. Currently, it does not function any more. As per resolution 2000 of BHWDB, the major functions of BHWDB were as follows:

- 1. “Coordinate the integrated development of hairs and wetlands in Bangladesh among the ministries, agencies and local government bodies. Establish a master plan for integrated development of Hairs and wetlands.*
- 2. Formulate projects related to development of Hairs and wetlands and implement the project through local government bodies or other agencies.*
- 3. Examine and coordinate different projects implemented by different ministries and provide proper advice to the implementing agencies.*
- 4. Take any necessary steps to complete the related activities of the Board.” (Cited in Hussein & Salam 2007: 7).*

BHWDB has lost its credibility and yet to fulfill the goals and missions of the board. There is no official explanation available for its dysfunctional status. For the government of Bangladesh to fulfill its commitment towards the Millennium Development Goal (MDG), it cannot afford to avoid the special policy consideration for the hoar people. In the process of constructing the PRSP, hoar people deserve a special attention.



Waterways in the life and livelihoods of Hoar people

Section-2

Methodology

A. Research Objectives: In accordance with the Terms of Reference (TOR), this research has some broader and specific objectives:

Broader Objectives:

Understand the state of essential services in Hoar areas.

Find out the problems in delivering the essential services to the Hoar people.

Provide the necessary recommendations.

Specific Objectives:

Find out the present state of education, health, communication and transportation, and agriculture and livestock and fisheries in Hoar areas in Kishoreganj district.

Find out the capacity of the government and non-government entities in delivering the basic services.

Find out the problems of ensuring the effective basic services to the people.

Provide the specific recommendations for each component of the basic services for further improvement.

B. Areas of Study:

Two upazillas under Kishoregonj district are selected for this study. With regards to providing the basic services, the activities of concerned departments of the governments and the activities of NGOs were studied. Besides, different stakeholders in the villages are also interviewed.

C. Participatory Approach:

The study adopted a participatory approach to collect the primary data. In an aim towards that the study team used various methods and techniques to collect the data. These include participate observation, in-depth interview, Focus Group Discussion and case studies. The insights and suggestions of the people who are the ultimate target of the essential services are also considered and common concerns are given priority.

D. Fieldwork:

The researchers in both the locations conducted fieldwork for data collection. The duration of fieldwork was two weeks.

E. Data Collection:

- Review secondary literature on Haor.
- Examination of official records at field level.
- Sharing meeting with the key actors including government and non-government organizations, civil society and union parishad members.
- Focus Group Discussions with the common people in the villages, union parishad members, beneficiary groups, and female groups.
- In-depth interview with the concerned government officials who are responsible for providing the basic services at field level.
- Interview with the District Commissioner and Upazilla Nirbahi Officers (UNO) of Kishoreganj District.

Section-3

3.1 General Problems in Haor Areas at a Glance

- River erosion and insufficient lands for all.
- Frequent natural disaster especially the flood, cyclones and heavy monsoon.
- Lack of adequate transport and communication.
- Infrequent presence of Government Officials providing the essential services.
- Lack of access to the common property such as the *Jalmahal* (water body).
- Lack of government's essential services especially in education, health, water and sanitation, communication, and agriculture and livestock and fisheries.
- Lack of marketing facilities for the poor agriculture producers and fishermen.
- Land grabbing by the influential.

- Shortage of schools especially the girls' school and lack of proper management of school.
- Educational activities affected by flood and students are at risk during the flood and other natural disasters.
- Destruction of biodiversity.
- Lack of dredging of the rivers and canals.
- Lack of web protection walls.
- Presence of *dadan*, a local form of money lending existing in agriculture and fisheries.
- Lack of non-agriculture based employment opportunities.
- Lack of adequate flood shelters.

3.2 State of Education

The state of education is very disappointing in Haor areas. According to NIPORT (2005), Sylhet district (which has the largest concentration of Haors) has the lower proportion of people attending the primary and secondary education in compare to other divisions. In Kishoreganj district, the condition of education at the primary and secondary level is not very satisfactory. In Kishorganj, the literacy rate is around 60% however, in each upazilla, the rate is lower than the district average. In Nikli upazila, the literacy rate is around 40%.



Children using boats to get to schools



Interview with the district Education Officer

The problems of education in Haor areas are many. During our field visit in two upazillas in Kishoreganj, we find problems in education in terms of number of schools, poor physical condition of the existing schools, tutor-pupil ratio, teaching instruments, hygienic latrines, playgrounds, schoolbooks, and other necessary conditions for ensuring the quality education.

General Problem of Education in Haor Areas

- Number of educational institutions is much lower than other regions.
- Within the Haor regions, number of girls' school is lower than the boys or general school. Girl's enrolment rate is low and drop-out rate is high.
- Lack of transportation and communication is one of the main problems in Haor areas. This prohibits girl education significantly.
- At the time of natural disaster, schools in Haor areas become the shelter center that hampers school's academic calendar.
- In many villages there are no primary or high schools. Students have to commute miles to attend the schools. This is very troublesome especially during both the dry and rainy season. Distance also discourages girl students to remain out of schools.
- Inside schools, lack of qualified teachers, school supplies, low tutor-pupil ratio, lack of female teachers etc. are the main obstacles for ensuring quality education.
- Lack of recreational facilities in the school is also a problem. Students find school as an uninteresting place for them to go and learn.

Specific Problem of Education in Haor Areas in Kishoreganj District

- Number of educational institutions in Haor areas is lower than that of the mainland.
- At the time of natural disasters, schools are used as shelter centers for the villagers. Thus, significantly disrupts school activities.
- During the rainy season, students rely on boats to go to school. Students needed to pay around Tk100 per month which is costly for their parents. Apart from this, the rough webs in the river around that time also become very dangerous for fatal accidents.
- Dry season (after the flood water goes away) is the most difficult time for the students. As roads are not well built and there are also inadequate transports at the village level, students have to walk miles to get to school.
- The attendance in school is lower during the harvest season. Students help their parents in the home which keep them away from school.
- The drop-out rate is also higher. Surprisingly, girl's attendance is better than that

of the boys. It is largely due to the stipends for the girls which attracted many female students.

- The poor economic conditions of the households also discourage students to attend schools.
- Lack of proper conditions in the school such as inadequate classrooms, space in the classroom, playgrounds, and latrines etc are also the problems in school.
- The quality of the teachers of the NGO-run schools is also a great concern. Often times, they do not meet the national standard for primary school teachers.

3.3 State of Health

Generally, the status of health services in Haor areas is lower than that of other regions. An overwhelming majority in Haor areas depends on traditional healers. At the village level, Ayurveda medicine (the ancient medicine in Indian-subcontinent) is most prominent. Imam and other religious leaders also provide treatments to their disease and illness. There is a shortage of modern medical facilities. Government hospitals are inadequate and are in poor conditions. In the health policy of the government, Haor and char do not get any special policy consideration. Thus, the central health policy seems to be ineffective due to the special geographical condition in these areas. Considering the unique context of char and Haor areas, the centralized structure of health services by the government needs to be reexamined.



Interview with the Deputy Civil Surgeon



Use of river water before cooking the fish

The health service system in two Upazillas (Nikli and Mithmoin) in Kishoreganj district is even worse. Like many other districts, Kishoreganj is also provided with government hospital. However, inadequate doctors, nurses, medicines, hospital equipments are the features of present-day hospital. The poor condition of the hospital leads to poor health services to the people in these areas. In an interview with the deputy civil surgeon of the hospital, he commented that “let alone the doctors even the nurses are not willing to work in these areas.” Each hospital at the upazilla level should have nine (9) doctors, ten (10) nurses, five (5) cleaners and other medical personnel. However, during the field

observation it is found that only one (1) doctor, two (2) nurses, one (1) cleaner are available in the hospital.

General problems of health in Haor/char areas

- Generally, government health care facilities at the union level do not function. An acute shortage of doctors, nurses, medical officers, medical equipments and other medical facilities are the actual scenario of health services.
- Common diseases among the Haor people are high mortality rate of children and mother, the problems of malnutrition, the problems in birth control, Pelvic infection, nutritional disease especially among the children and pregnant women, chronic respiratory infections and weight loss.
- Women especially the poorer ones do not get pre and post natal services from the health center.
- Poor communication and transport facilities especially in the dry seasons make it difficult to carry patients to district health complexes for critical clinical treatment.
- Lack of medicines in the hospitals. Although medicines should be provided free of cost, many poor patients are forced to buy from their own pockets.
- Distant location of the hospitals that increase the transport cost of health service seekers from remote areas. With the same travel cost, they rather prefer to go to nearby divisional cities where they can also explore other options of private health service facilities.
- Lack of good quality laboratories at the Upazilla level.
- Lack of trained mid wives, family planning workers.

3.4 Communication

Transport and communication is very fragile in char/Haor areas. Waterway is the main route of communication of the people in Haor areas. Boat and trawler are the main modes of transportation. People have to wait for long time to travel to different places. They can hardly travel to the urban center twice or thrice a day. Due to the unavailability of the boats and trawlers, people with urgent health needs cannot be carried to the hospitals/health complexes at the urban centers. These poor transport and communication is the cause of the loss of many lives in Haor areas. Due to the lack of transportation, the incidence of death of children and pregnant women is higher and is quite unfortunate.



Trawler and boats are the principal modes of transportation in Haor areas

The illegal operation of many engine boats, trawler, and launches etc without the proper fitness certificate from the concerned government authorities is also a great problem. This poses a real danger to the life of the passengers especially during the rainy season. There have been reports of accidents that took hundreds of lives and damage properties over the years. Government's effort to curb this crime is negligible.

During the field investigation it is also reported that there are some incidents of murder and tolling in waterway. The lack of regular police patrolling encourages many mishaps like these to take place. Government's law enforcing agencies seem to be indifferent in this regard.

In many Haor areas there is a lack of paved roads. Unpaved roads also require repairing especially immediate after the water goes away. The conditions of the unpaved roads are also in bad shape. In Nikli Upazilla, recently built submergible roads seem to be very effective. Given the special features in the Haor areas, more submergible roads need to be constructed to cover the entire region.

To develop the infrastructure in these areas, the dredging of the river is the need of the time. The adequate river transportation will bring a new light in the lifestyles of the people in these areas.

3.5 Water and Sanitation

In the remote areas in Kishoreganj district, the sources of safe drinking water are the tube well. Unfortunately, most of the people in two upazillas do not have adequate access to the safe water. The government sponsored tube wells are not enough in numbers and due to proper maintenance and monitoring, most of the tube wells are out of order. In addition, most of the tube wells go under water during rainy season. Some local NGOs have distributed tube wells among the poor people in the villages. One of such NGOs is People's Oriented Program Implementation (POPI). Under their River Basin Program (RBP), POPI has distributed many tube wells among the poor inhabitants in two upazillas.

During our field visit we have observed that the water and sanitation condition in two

upazillas is rather fragile. People are vulnerable to many water-borne diseases due to their patterns of the use of water. Most of the people have limited knowledge about the health risk associated with the use of unsafe and unclean water. Water is in abundance in Haor areas, but the Haor people face an acute shortage of safe drinking water throughout the year. Most of the households use the water of river, beel, canal and Haors in their daily activities. At the household level, they use these sources of water for cooking, washing, shower etc. As a result, diarrhea and dysentery is very prevalent in Haor areas. According to the interview with a doctor, during the dry season the number of patients with diarrheal diseases increases while during the flood season it decreases.



Interview with the Executive Engineer of DPHE, Kishoregonj and POPI staffs

Most of the households do not have the sanitary latrines. Like other Haor areas in Bangladesh, most of the households in two upazillas use the hanging latrines. These latrines pose serious threat to public health. The government's initiatives in this regard are very minimal. Although they have distributed some latrines but these latrines are not enough to cover the majority. Statistics available in the government public health department shows that all the upazillas in Kishoregonj district have less than 50% sanitation coverage. However, Nikli shows a relatively better figure (almost 60%) of sanitation coverage. To supplement this need, some NGOs especially the initiatives by POPI are quite mentionable. POPI distributed safe sanitation equipments among the poor villagers. It also undertook massive health awareness campaigns in the community.

Statistics from the public health department shows that about 80-90% of water coverage in all the upazillas in Kishoregonj district. NGOs initiatives in this area are not adequate. The government mostly distributes the tube wells. NGOs usually do not provide tube wells as many as needed. However, NGOs have demonstrated good campaign in awareness building for the safe drinking water.

3.6 Agriculture and Livestock and Fisheries

Agriculture is the principal profession of the Haor people. However, day-by-day the net cultivable land for agriculture is decreasing due to siltation through flooding. Therefore, people are forced to give up cultivation- their traditional and oldest profession, and struggle to find new employments. The employment options are very limited in the village. As most of cultivable land is one-crop, thus, agriculture laborers do not have any

work during the non-harvesting period. At that time, people especially the poor ones migrate to the big cities to look for new opportunities for living. A large number of farmers also sit idle in the village during the lean period.

There is a limited opportunity for taking credits from the government channels. The credit from the government Krishi Bank in hoar areas is not enough. A large number of genuine farmers do not take loans from the Krishi bank. They find the government bank as very bureaucratic and also feel less confident with the government banks.



A scenic view of the Boro field in Haor areas.



Loading the sweet potatoes from the field

Generally, government's agriculture extension officers do not visit regularly in the Haor areas. The updated knowledge and information on rice production is disseminated through the sub-assistant officers (SAOs). They receive the agricultural information from Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI). However, often times, this particular job task is compromised as they are burdened with their extra workload of ensuring the proper distribution of fertilizer.

Boro is the main crop of majority of the Haor areas. There are many varieties of which Manik Ratan and Roma BF are very popular in Kishoreganj. Sometimes, uncontrollable situations such as late and excessive flooding, fertilizer and seed crisis also hamper Boro cultivation.

Migration

Migration is a regular feature in the lives of the Haor people. Due to river erosion many households lost their homes and are forced to migrate elsewhere. In a village in Nikli upazilla in Kishoreganj, around 400-500 households migrated due to riverbank erosion. About 122 families have come back to the village again after the web protection wall was built. POPI, a national non-profit organization, helped some villagers to rebuild their houses. There are two types of migration in Nikli- permanent and seasonal migration. Permanent migration occurs among the wealthy families and seasonal migration occurs among the poor families. The second sort of migration happens during the flood. It brings immense sufferings to the migrated family. Usually, the male members of the household leave the house leaving behind his family. In many of the migrated families, the wife and children usually work as maids in other households. These females have to go through various physical and mental hardships while her husband is away. The children of these families are even more vulnerable. No one takes care of them. They live like a street kid and are vulnerable to many diseases due to unsafe and unhygienic health practices. The rate of seasonal migration roughly estimated by POPI is about 40%.

Livestock

Many people in Haor areas are also involved in dairy and poultry farming. The government assistance in this sector is very minimal. Each upazilla, there is a livestock hospital. During our field visit it seems that people have little knowledge about the hospital. Many people even do not know that a hospital of this kind even exists. Due to adequate transport and lack of knowledge, Haor people cannot fully utilize this government's resources. Given its unique ecological condition, there is a huge potential for dairy and poultry farming especially the duck rearing in Haor areas. Recently, some NGOs have given some small-scale training to the farmers which helped them increase their incomes.



Livestock- a potential source of livelihood in Haor areas.

Fisheries

Fishing is an important source of livelihood for the people in Haor area. Many people are related to this profession directly or indirectly. However, the new leasing system by the government could not ensure people's rights to the common property such as- the open water body. Rather, it benefited the local influential elites. Due to the new leasing system, many ordinary fishermen are deprived of fishing in the vast areas of water body. The new leasing system allowed the leaseholders to control the vast areas of wetland during the wet season. With the help of some corrupt government officials, a tiny influential section of people take the lease of a small piece of wetland. And, during the wet season, when the vast areas go under water, they prohibit ordinary fishermen to fish in the vast areas by arguing that "fish follows the water and fishermen follow the fish." Thus, they unlawfully claim that they are the leaseholder of the vast wetlands.

Most of the fishermen also do not have their own boats and nets for fishing. They borrow these fishing equipments at different rates, often a higher rate, than usual. In some Haor areas, fishermen have to give 50 per cent of fishes caught to the boat and net owners as rental.



Fisheries is one of the natural resources in Haor areas

Ordinary fishermen also borrow money from the local fish traders. These traders exploit the ordinary fishermen through their unofficial business deals. Under the deal, the fishermen have to sell the fishes caught to these traders at a cheaper rate as to repay their loans. The fish traders sell these fish at higher rate to the whole sellers.

3.7 Development Initiatives by the Non-Profit Organizations

Along with the government agencies, many national and international development agencies are working in Haor/char areas. By and large, their programs aim to improving the overall living conditions of the char/Haor people. However, their activities do not cover the vast majority of Haor people. There are also some local organizations that mostly work on some specific issues. These organizations work for community mobilization to raise awareness on health, education, community forestation, preservation of nature and environment, and other human right issues. The activities of these organizations seem to be very effective and have positive effects on the lives of Haor people. Many of these organizations won the hearts and minds of Haor dwellers through their successful programs and activities. Along with their credit programs, many organizations are also providing trainings and skills to the beneficiary groups for other income generating activities. Non-profit organizations in these areas also formed different networks, associations and forums for better coordination and outcome of specific development goals.



Meeting with the UP Chairman and POPI staffs in Nikli

In Nikli upazilla of Kishoreganj district, there are number of national and international organizations working for the development of Haor people. These organizations have taken various development initiatives to improve the living situation of Haor dwellers.

In Kishoreganj, international agencies such as CARE, OXFAM-GB, and CONCERN have programs in the areas of infrastructure, livelihoods, and disaster management etc. Among the national organizations, the activities by the national organization People Oriented Program Implementation (POPI), is particularly prominent. They have been working in Nikli since 2000. They work in the areas of wave protection wall, plantation, water and sanitation and livelihood. During the crisis period, they employ both male and female labors with relatively better wage. They also help built the high-rise homes and tube wells. They also provide ducks, boats, solar panel, sewing and shallow machines for income generation of their beneficiaries. In the area of skill training, they provide trainings on vaccinations and leadership skill.

Through various development works, non-profit organizations have created a positive enthusiasm among the Haor people. The people in Haor areas are very brave and hardworking. Their motivation to improve their life situation is a great positive aspect of their personality. Non-profit organization with their experience and orientation in working with the involvement of peoples can be seen as an established platform for future development initiatives.

Section –4

4.1 The Unheard Voices: Suggestions from Haor People

While doing the participatory research, a wide range of suggestions came from the individual respondents, various groups, and organizations for the overall development of haor people, its nature, and environment. We find these suggestions very useful. We have presented the important suggestions under specific areas of concern.



FGD with the beneficiary groups of POPI



Villagers are constructing houses supported by POPI

Suggestions (Education)

- Special construction design is needed for the Haor schools.
- A separate structure of payment for the teachers in Haor schools. Teachers are unwilling to stay in Haor areas due to the difficulties they experience at the local level.
- Each school should be provided with some boats as means of transportation for the students during the monsoon period.
- More community participation is needed in day-to-day school operation.
- School Management Committee (SMC) needs to be strengthened so that SMC can enjoy more power in the affairs of overall school management.
- Close interaction between SMCs and the parents are also needed.

Suggestions (Health)

- At the policy level, two-year service in these areas should be mandatory for the doctors and no transfer order for the doctors should be practiced.
- Young, energetic and fresh graduates should be appointed in these areas as they relatively have a heightened sense of nationhood at the early stage of their professional career.
- The doctors who served in these areas should also be given preference while selecting the doctors for the trainings and scholarships abroad.
- While appointing the doctors in Haor areas, the preferences should also be given to those doctors who are from Haor areas. They should also be offered with special salary incentives.

- The cooperation and coordination between GO and NGOs should also be strengthened.

Suggestions (Water and Sanitation)

- Ensure proper distribution of tube wells in areas where they needed most.
- Prohibit nepotism in distribution of government's sanitary latrines and tube wells.
- Distribute free of cost latrines and tube wells to the poorest of the poor.

Suggestions (Agriculture and Livestock and Fisheries)

- Proper distribution of common property such as- *Jalmahals* (water body) among the ordinary fishermen.
- Local elites control the common property through various unlawful means. Government should prohibit this practice.
- Government can earn more revenues if it revises the existing leasing system. By doing that, government can earn more revenues than what it receiving now.
- Government should find out the genuine poor and needy fishermen. As they lack initial investments, government or NGOs can provide loans to the fishermen. They can form a fishermen club and can provide them necessary training for the management of the loans.

The interviews were given in Bengali. The English translation is ours.

4.2 Suggestions from the Government Officials in Kishoreganj District:

- More submergible roads should be constructed to cover the vast areas of Kishoreganj district.
- To increase the logistic support of the hospitals. Due to the excessive flood water, speed boats, water ambulance and engine trawler should be used to ferry the patients to the hospital. These transports can significantly reduce the mother and child mortality rate in these areas.
- Introduce the community latrines where there are shortages of lands. A committee should be formed for the proper maintenance of these latrines.
- The scheduled time for summer vacation should be readjusted so that students can help their parents during the harvest time without compromising their school hours.
- Reestablish the Haro Unnnoyan Board
- Logistics support to the Government basic service providers
- Strengthening the GO and NGO cooperation
- Tourism Development

4.3 WAYS FORWARD

In addition to the above-mentioned suggestions from the Haor people, we also suggest some recommendations to government and non-government institutions to improve the live and livelihoods of the people of Haor areas. A majority of Haor people does not get essential services provided by the government. Although having access to government essential services is their constitutional right, Bangladesh government is yet to ensure that. Depriving Haor people from their fundamental human rights can be seen as a violation of human rights by the state. Recent development initiatives by the government should pay attention to the needs of the Haor people. Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP) for Bangladesh should be sensitive to the needs of Haor people. An in-depth understanding of the problems and realities at the local level would help the government to achieve the goals of PRSP.

Recommendations:

- The communication has to be improved in Haor areas. Good communication and transport facilities are an utmost important for the sustainable development in haor areas.
- To ensure an effective land communication, submergible roads have to be built in Haor areas. During the wet seasons submergible roads go under water, but these

roads remain effective and useable in the dry seasons.

- Regular dredging of the rivers, beels and canals has to be ensured by the concerned government's departments in order for the smooth operation of the transports and to reduce the intensity of flood and land erosion.
- Adequate number of web protection wall should also be in place to reduce losses of lives and properties of Haor people. The existing initiatives by the donors and NGOs should be supplemented by government's support and initiatives.
- A comprehensive study on Haor is needed for any effective planning, designing and implementation of Haor related programs and projects.
- A participatory approach is important for any needs assessment of the Haor people.
- Haor people should also realize their own rights and should learn the ways to press demand from the government bodies to ensure their rights.
- Government should form a separate board with clear goals and missions for the well-being of Haor people and its eco-system. Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board (BHWDB) should be reestablished to ensure its better performance.
- Empowering the Local Government Institutions (LGIs) with sufficient resources and financial autonomy. An effective coordination between LGIs and NGOs is needed for the attainment of various development schemes.
- Government and NGOs should develop institutional mechanism to motivate their workforce so that they find their work rewarding and are willing to work for the Haor people.
- There is a need for a strong political commitment on the part of the government to improve the lives of millions in Haor areas.
- Special allocation of funds from the government is needed for the development of Haor people. In order to increase their livelihood options, some non-agriculture based employments should be created especially during the lean periods.
- A special construction design is needed for the schools in Haor areas. Schools should also be equipped with qualified teachers, school supplies, tube wells, latrines and meals during school hours.
- Government should ensure the rights of the ordinary people to the common property. Actual fishers should have adequate access to the wetlands. The existing government leasing systems of the wetlands should be revisited.

- A special academic calendar should be introduced in Haor areas so that students can help their parents during the harvest time without compromising their school hours.
- The number of primary and secondary schools, colleges, hospitals should be increased. These institutions should be located in backward areas instead of the semi-urban centers. Regular monitoring by the central government authorities are needed to ensure quality essential services to the people.
- Immediate attention is needed to sensitize government organs to provide support for the development of haor people. If necessary, a separate ministry can be set up for the haor people.
- Haor schools can be designed to serve multiple purposes so that they can use the school building at the time of natural disaster such as flood and cyclones. There is a need to build more roads approaching schools.
- Developing the cluster-based health services facilities. Rather than establishing a central hospital, government should consider establishing cluster-based hospitals in different locations.
- Special health policy and structure are needed to provide effective health services to the people in Haor areas.
- A successful health policy should also be doctors friendly. As a key player in health service, the health policy should be sensitive to the needs and demands of the doctors. In the past, health policies were more geared towards the welfare of the people, which is quite justified, but doctors should also be rewarded for their noble and hard work.
- Haor areas have the potentials for the promotion of tourism in the country. Efforts from the government and private sectors are needed to develop coordinated plans to utilize this new business opportunity.
- Increase the logistical supports of the local government agencies delivering the essential services.
- To curve crimes in Haor areas, Police forces should be equipped with sufficient vehicles such as speedboats, motorbikes, etc. for regular patrolling.
- Government, NGOs and CBOs should take massive awareness program to sensitize the community so that they will be motivated enough to use safe water and hygienic latrines.
- Establish an effective Essential Services Network with the involvement of GoB,

Civil Society and NGOs.

- Reestablish the Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development Board (BHWDB).

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