

North-eastern haors: Managing the floods

SAEEDUR RAHMAN

FLOODWATERS have phenomenal linkage with water bodies. Water bodies across the country are categorised differently based on salient characteristics of their origin and location. The total area of such water bodies has been variously estimated; one different from the other. The open water and the closed water bodies inclusive of *haors*, *bars* and *beels* are respectively of 40,47,000 ha and 3,51,000 ha totalling 43,98,000 ha that comprise 30 percent of the total surface area. The others include rivers and estuaries, artificial lake, flooded lands, ponds and coastal lowlands. *Haors* are clustered in the north-east region and are large bowl-shaped flood plain depressions. These *haors* are currently being managed for resources used by the local population with supports from different government and non-government agencies. The north-east region is one of the eight such distinct and defined units that hydrologically zone the entire country. Its area is estimated at 24,200 square kilometer i.e. 17.50 percent of the country's total land surface.

The 411 number of *haors* cover an area of 800,000 ha equalling almost 33 percent of the region. The region experiences some of the most extreme hydrological conditions and is prone to severe flooding. Annual rainfall ranges from 2200 mm along the western boundary to 5800 mm in its north-east corner and as high as 12,000 mm in the headwater of some catchments extending into the bordering state of India. The flooding depth is usually 3 to 5 meter but may be as deep as 6 meter in the worst case. The principal rivers of the region include the Surma and the Kushiya which drain the eastern side of the region and, the Kangsha the western side while the rivers Kalni and Baulai drain the central basin. Most, as good as 140, of 260 freshwater fish species in the country are found in the north-east region. Besides other ecological aspects, a total of 125 waterfowl species are known to have occurred in the region. The *haor* and *haor* basins are frequented by an estimated 80,000 migratory birds annually. Floods transport organic matter and, the vast *haor* area, is covered by crops that can tolerate water-logging and inundation.

Water Board has been managing part of these water bodies, currently 46 by number completed with limited focus on protecting the *boro* crops in *haor* area from early flash floods since last decade. Another 26

haors are under development and more 38 planned. The length of the completed submergible dyke is about 2000 km and on completion of the 64 said, the total length of dykes will be 3200 km along with huge number of hydraulic structures. These interventions have positive impacts but at the same time have induced silting of *haor* and *haor* basin. The existing heights of the submergible dykes are now below the originally designed/built crest levels in almost all the *haors*. It has been empirically assessed that 40 percent dyke length is presently below the designed/built crest levels. This is because of cumulative recurrent loss of the top soil due to overtopping and submergence. It is also common that the crest levels of submergible dykes of the adjoining *haors* separated by a stream or river are also unreasonably varied in many cases. This tempts the under-

funding and post-monsoon drainage are linked to routine overhauling of *haor* infrastructures and follow-up cropping. Conflicts amongst fishers, farmers and boaters impede drainage and even lead to under/excessive drainage of *haor* with reference to timing. The potentials of vegetative protective measures in reducing the flood risks and damages have not been tapped so far. *Hijol*, *Cane*, *Dhalkolmi* and *Vetiver* including other kinds of deep water tolerant species are that vegetation abundantly grown in the *haors*. Local initiatives for protecting homesteads and lands by vegetation are found ubiquitously practised and effective. Setting the institution is another important aspect in developing a participatory and belongingness spirit in the flood management. Involvement of local community appears to be a better alternative to the current practice of

ment of causeways shall also be funded from other sources. A yearly unallocated sum of 10 percent of the ADP by size for each particular project/scheme/*haor* shall be kept for utilisation by the local Member of Parliament, who shall decide upon the physical works to be taken up to meet the community needs; albeit within the approved project components.

Community Based Organisations (CBOs) based on administrative boundaries of the Union Parishad (UP) shall be formed by election or selection as the *haor* population opt for. These CBOs may be called as Resources Management Committees (RMCs) and shall require to have obtained concurrence of the Minister in-charge of the district concerned. The committee shall be formed in line with the provisions in the national Guidelines for Participatory Water Management. Efforts

shall also include the cost of plantation for reclaiming the *haor* ecology which will eventually protect the dykes from erosion by wind-generated waves, breach and overtopping. The protection of vegetation shall be the responsibility of the RMC.

Twenty-five percent of the value of works as advance payment shall initially be made to the RMC as revolving fund to support the physical implementation of the works. Five percent of the amount credited to the bank account at every payment made by the Regional Accounting Centre shall be retained in the RMC bank account and this savings shall not be withdrawn/debited unless otherwise agreed jointly by the field engineer concerned and the Chairman of the RMC. The deposits/savings accrued from this five percent retention shall form the working capital for future O&M of the *haor* water infrastructures within the jurisdiction of the RMC. The retained and accrued five percent compulsory deposit may be temporarily withdrawn and used for initial starting of the work in exceptional circumstances of fund crises, which shall be jointly decided upon by the field engineer and the RMC subject to immediate replenishment at the subsequent payment stages.

The conventional method of year-to-year basis investment in the management of floods in *haor* and *haor* basin has proven to be inadequately effective appalling the *haor* population. The formulation of an integrated and co-ordinated approach is the desired alternative to optimise the use of the *haor* resources, water in particular. Under various limitations, it is required to adopt an ad hoc management plan for the *haor* and the *haor* basin. The fine tuning of the prevalent institutional setting proposed is the immediate shift from monopoly of engineering to a mix of engineering and non-engineering components in the approach; given the thrusts on planning and implementation process. Stakeholders' participation shall anchor the long-term sustainability of the *haor* and *haor* basin management with respect to floods. The plan may initially be applied and implemented in a limited area and with lessons learned therefrom the current version may be continuously revised and updated to cope with the changing contexts and shall be the building blocks for the long-term plan to be drawn up in the future for managing the floods.

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Tony knows best



ROBIN COOK

with the two famous sofas on which Tony Blair and his visitor face each other over a coffee table. The approach works partly because one of Blair's great assets is his immense charm, which makes disagreement with him appear positively rude. Even those of us who have fallen out with him on policy find it almost impossible to dislike him as a person.

The agreement reached on the sofas is then reported round the

United Nations or in Europe.

Cabinet ministers were informed of the background intelligence, but it was always on the basis of an oral presentation by John Scarlett, the head of the Joint Intelligence Committee. There were no briefing papers spelling out the caveats about the thinness of the intelligence. Perhaps the balance of views might have shifted if we had been allowed to see the "excellent quality papers" that Lord Butler discovered, but I doubt it. The real problem was that Blair made it only too clear that his mind was made up and his cabinet had no collective experience of trying to make the prime minister change his mind.

Blair is not alone in limiting the role of the cabinet. Margaret Thatcher also was impatient of what she saw as time wasted on argument. The two longest-serving Conservative and Labour prime ministers of the past century are both driven personalities who share the view that the job of government is to get on with pushing through change and not to let it be delayed by debate. Both sought to construct cabinets that would agree with them rather than question them, though ultimately Thatcher's ruin was that she was not as successful as Blair in doing so.

There are benefits from a system that makes it easy to get agreement. The pace of reform under his government has been so breathtakingly dramatic precisely because he has streamlined decision-making and concentrated power in his own office. The problem is that changes that make it quicker to reach a decision also make it easier to commit a mistake. Strip away the checks and balances in the system, and you are left with a process of government dangerously dependent on the man at the top getting it right, and hopelessly incapable of halting him when he gets it wrong. In any event, Blair's style of government was as culpable as that of intelligence in committing his country to the Iraq war that is proving to be among the most controversial blunders in British foreign and security policy since the invasion of Suez.

Robin Cook was British foreign secretary from 1997 to 2001. He was leader of the House of Commons until March 2003, when he resigned over government's policy in Iraq.

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advantaged *haor* population to be envious of those advantaged. The confinement effect has also made the dykes more fragile to floods.

At the bottom line, it is also visible that in implementation of the physical works the very mindsets of the key implementers are traditionally indifferent; more specifically not committed to reach finish line rather wait -- availing of the opportunities (?) surging from the floods. Such attitudes generally remain unearthed so long the harvest of *boro* crops is preceded by flood damages. The chronicles reveal that dyke-failures are infrequent but locations are repetitive. Large-area crop damages by failures of the submergible dykes around the fringes of the *haors* owing to its breach or overtopping have been caused in the past. Public abuses for such failures have all the time far outweighed the cognizance to large successes, although there are many. Compared to the past, the crop damages during 2004 have hit the *haor* population so hard that a question mark has been mounted by the local intellectuals and public representatives on Water Board's competence for dealing with management of floods in *haors*; heightened the log of concerns.

Pre-monsoon flooding, monsoon

awarding contracts to those who do not have any neighbourhood obligations to *haor* population.

Carrying out necessary modelling study of the hydrological system as a whole for a sound planning with specific recommendations may be a useful tool for long-term action plan and its sustainability. But at the same time not waiting too long for a too scientific planning, the short-term action plan needs to be implemented on year-to-year basis that may eventually be subsumed with the long-term plan to be drawn up sometimes in the future. The action plan of *haor* and *haor* basins will be limited to water resources issues with particular focus on routine and adequate maintenance of *haor* water infrastructures with the lone objective of protecting *boro* crops from floods and its management.

Anotional allocation of resources ahead of every upcoming FY based on past experiences and govt. priority shall be made. Allocation shall include temporary protective measures in case of an emergent situation at the time of flood on-rush to save the crops from damages by way of breach/collapse of the dykes. Other than the earth work, the appurtenant type of works such as, repair/rehabilitation of hydraulic structures, hard materials revert-

in general shall be made to advance the plantation period of the *boro* crops by facilitating early drainage of the *haor* resolving the prevalent conflicts amongst fishers, farmers and boaters through inter-agency meetings/discussions at the district and thana level with supports from Thana Nirbahi Officer and Deputy Commissioner.

The RMC will be responsible for the social and engineering survey works with support from engineering and extension units. The RMC will prepare and submit the need based budgets on year-to-year basis to the field engineer concerned who upon receipt of that shall determine the priority ranking of implementation of the proposed and programmed routine maintenance works. Field engineers will draw up a comprehensive plan and design in association with planning and design experts. The physical works approved in the form of ADP shall be allotted to RMC in accordance with the procurement regulations. Only the programmes are poverty alleviation oriented. The dykes already in place in all the *haors* shall be gradually brought back in line and grade. A long-term plan for vegetation along the fringes of the *haor*, more specifically on both sides of the dykes shall be drawn by the RMC. Yearly alloca-

Population programmes and directions

DR. SYED JAHANGEER HAIDER

"W" E have to check population boom at any cost. Otherwise our efforts in development, progress, peace and prosperity will fail". This is an excerpt from the speech delivered by the Hon'ble Prime Minister to celebrate World Population Day on 11 July 2004. (The Daily Star, July 12, 2004). Efforts to reduce fertility and unbridled growth of population are a national priority and mandate. The issue is not whether to put concerted efforts on arresting accelerated growth of population, but how to make the programme a success and the growth rate to stabilise so that benefits of development investments are not eaten away by the increasing rates of population growth.

Success or failure of a development endeavour would ultimately depend on the willingness of the stakeholders, particularly the beneficiaries (target population) to accept development services and participate in the development interventions. And the people (the beneficiaries) would not participate in the development initiatives unless they themselves rationalise their priorities matching with the particular development interventions or initiatives. Population programme was launched in the sixties. Since then the programme has been growing in size expanding its sphere of operations. Initially, a single focused vertical programme succeeded to raise awareness and introduce a new behaviour -- contraception. As the programme grew, the need for changing knowledge, attitude and practices (behaviours) became evident and the success depended not only on the single focused interventions, instead required inputs from allied developmental interventions, such as Health and other multisectoral programmes including support of NGOs. Accordingly, the population programme in Bangladesh, which is officially known as MCH based Family Planning Programme, has gone through at least four major phases of transformations starting from single focused government run FP programme in the sixties to Integrated Health and FP

Would it be wise to emphasise on a single focused FP, where field workers are accepted as the key instrument to achieve the ultimate goals of reducing fertility levels in the country or should one strategise to combine the efforts of both health and FP workers with institutional facilities (Health and FP Centres) as central to achieve fertility, mortality and morbidity reductions not just fertility control alone? Because, the nation needs both quality and productive manpower without which development is hard to occur.

programme, again as family planning programme, followed by MCH based FP programme and lastly Health and Population Sector Program (HPSP). Globally, since ICPD Cairo strategies in 1994, Family Planning is being viewed as part of an overall Reproductive Health Initiative.

Initially, FP Programme in the sixties was launched with massive deployment of Family Planning Field Workers prioritising domiciliary visit as major strategy. This raised the level of awareness about contraceptives to more than ninety percent in about fifteen years. But the level of practice of contraceptives, remained at ten percent till early eighties. Introduction of Child Survival (EPI) programmes both globally and also in Bangladesh made a breakthrough in accelerating the pace of acceptance of contraceptives among the target population at a constant rate of increase of 1.5 per cent annually. The reason was that the mothers, the primary stakeholders, could perceive that the gap between births of children and their survival was narrowing -- a confidence which induced greater levels of acceptance among many other direct and indirect influences. To-day when contraceptive prevalence rate has reached at more than 50 per cent level and with a continuing drop out rate of equally 50 per cent among the users of temporary methods, the issue of quality of service has become a predominant concern.

Acceptance or non-acceptance of behaviour pertaining to use of methods of family planning by the remaining 50 per cent of the target population is certainly not as simple as those falling within the category of first 50 per cent. Bangladesh

Demographic Health Survey, 1999-2000 (BDHS) also reflects that there is an unmet demand for FP to the extent of 15 per cent, but concerns for health and side-effects of the methods exist almost at the same level. How much of the remaining 50 per cent would be attracted by mere messages of Family Planning and through the field workers alone is a matter to be seriously pondered. One may argue that the field workers can effectively disseminate messages on integrated health and FP issues, but what good the field worker is worth for, if she cannot ensure the corresponding services, particularly on RH and also beyond the domiciliary services. Institutional facilities (centre/clinic based services) are key to achieving quality and effective services on Reproductive Health including FP. The other issue is how many of the remaining 50 per cent require contacts at the domiciliary level. How much domiciliary services can achieve in

terms of quality and also comprehensiveness of service required by a target audience to be measured in terms of cost effectiveness and benefits accrued. Again are we only concerned to reduce the number of population or are we concerned with quality of population, meaning population free from malnutrition and other quality deficiencies at birth and also during their periods of growth.

The most effective indicator of a programme on Family Planning nationally on a relatively long term basis is the achievement in the reduction of total fertility rate. Bangladesh has achieved a remarkable success in this regard with a TFR declining from 7 to 3.3. But the rate is stagnated nationally at that level for nearly a decade. The accompanying table specifies the levels of TFR and allied indicators on Reproductive Health for the period 1999-2000 comparatively by divisions (regions).

Table: Rates of acceptance and outcome (TFR) of FP and Reproductive Health Variables by Divisions: BDHS 1999-2000

Variables	Khulna	Rajshahi	Dhaka	Barisal	Chittagong	Sylhet	National
Rate of Current use of Contraceptives (%):							
• Any method	64.0	58.6	53.9	59.2	44.1	34.0	53.8
• Modern method	50.8	51.1	42.1	45.7	34.9	25.0	43.4
Percent distribution of Antenatal Care received (last birth) from:							
• Medically qualified persons (doctor and Nurse/midwife)	43.7	33.5	32.5	33.8	30.6	27	33.3
• All sources	48.5	39.8	35.8	36.9	32.1	29.5	37
Percent distribution of TT received during Pregnancy (last birth):	85.6	84.5	79.7	80.5	82.6	67.7	81.3
Percent Distribution of births by place of Delivery:							
• Health Facility	14.4	7.3	8.6	4.3	6.2	6.3	7.9
• At Home	85.1	91.9	91.0	95.7	93.6	93.1	91.6
Total Fertility Rate	2.70	3.02	3.21	3.26	3.96	4.08	3.31

The table shows that Khulna Division has achieved the best results not only on TFR and CPR, but also on all other allied RH indicators, while Sylhet Division has achieved the lowest on TFR, CPR and so also on the allied RH indicators. Results in the table demonstrate an interesting level of positive correlation between achievements of TFR, CPR and the allied RH indicators. Data in the table imply that those mothers who pursue improvements on RH status also pursue to achieve fertility control and vice versa. If the intent of the beneficiaries is integrated, should the programme of health and FP be segregated? Would it be wise to emphasise on a single focused FP, where field workers are accepted as the key instrument to achieve the ultimate goals of reducing fertility levels in the country or should one strategise to combine the efforts of both health and FP workers with institutional facilities (Health and FP Centres) as central to achieve fertility, mortality and morbidity reductions not just fertility control alone? Because, the nation needs both quality and productive manpower without which development is hard to occur.

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