

## Mora Kartik to Bhora Kartik: Scaling up comprehensive monga mitigation

To ensure a continuity of high-level national attention on the issue, there is a need to establish a comprehensive monga mitigation national committee headed by the focal ministry advisor and constituted of key secretaries and major policy actors outside the government. The national committee will function as a public-private policy coalition. To ensure dynamism, it can be supported by dual secretariats, one within the government and one amongst the actors outside the government. The committee should specifically address the tasks of: i) motivation, ii) coordination, iii) lesson-learning, and iv) monitoring.

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**E**LIMINATION of *monga*, i.e. the traditional problem of seasonal poverty in *Ashwin-Kartik* (September-October) in ecologically vulnerable parts of northern districts, has been identified in the PRS as a key component in the fight against extreme poverty.

There are two paradoxes worth bearing in mind when contemplating a scaled-up attack on *monga*. Firstly, Greater Rangpur, i.e. the region where the *monga* phenomenon is concentrated, is a food surplus rather than a food deficit area. This suggests the need for greater understanding and clarity about the risks and vulnerabilities faced by the region's poor, as well as the long-term livelihood constraints in which they have to operate.

The second paradox is that there is no dearth of anti-*monga* programs, particularly since the issue came into national focus several years ago. The persistence of *monga* vis-à-vis this multiplicity of programs thus suggests the need for a qualitatively stronger framework for coordination, a more effective lesson-learning from existing programs, and finally, establishment of a comprehensive data-base and a credible monitoring strategy.

### Importance of a paradigm shift

The dominant perspective informing the anti-*monga* strategy so far has been safety net considerations, whether these be temporary food support or temporary employment support. Research and program experience increasingly, however, underscore the importance of a paradigm shift on the issue. While safety net programs will remain a key component of the anti-*monga* strategy, the larger focus needs to be on long-term transformation of livelihood realities at individual, household and local economy levels.

It may be instructive to note here that *monga*-type seasonal poverty was more widespread across Bangladesh even two decades ago. But key drivers of change such as agricultural diversification and improved communication and migration have served to transform such erstwhile poverty pockets in Kushtia, Rajshahi, Bogra, Comilla, Noakhali, etc.

### Monga vulnerabilities: Four faces

While the traditional focus on *Ashwin-Kartik* seasonal poverty is indeed a core aspect of the problem, *monga* vulnerabilities are both deeper and larger than a problem of seasonal poverty per se. Four critical faces of vulnerabilities need to be distinguished:

- A declining but still significant problem of entrenched seasonal poverty affecting primarily agriculture labour-dependent households.
- A persisting problem of pockets of ecological vulnerability -- river erosion, flood-prone, sandy soil.
- An unpredictable variation in year-to-year severity of seasonal vulnerability determined by contextual factors, the two most important being timing of excess rain in August and September and robustness of the preceding boro crop.
- An overall problem of higher-than-national average level of poverty manifested in high landlessness and low diversity of livelihoods.

### Target group: Types and size

Given the multiple vulnerabilities described above, it is important to visualise the specific types of target groups which make up the *monga*-affected population. PPRC research has established the following typology and size of *monga*-affected target groups in the four districts of Kurigram, Gaibanda, Rangpur and Nilphamari (note that there is a degree of overlap between some of the categories).

Type of Target Group	Size (no. of households in 4 districts)
Seasonally unemployed agri-labourers (VGD clientele)	334,265
Chronic food deficit (extreme poor) hhs (VGD clientele)	188,181
River-eroded/squaret households	8,093
Landless households (without any homestead)	139,141
Small/marginal producers of risk-prone regional pockets	357,075

Source: PPRC Monga Research Findings, 2007

### Eco-vulnerable pockets

A critical new research finding emerging out of the PPRC monga research is the precise identification of the eco-vulnerable pockets within the

*monga*-affected districts. As can be seen from the table below, 30.5% of all villages in the four *monga*-affected districts suffer from severe eco-vulnerability through the relative proportion varies across districts.

District	Total no. of villages	Eco-vulnerable villages
Kurigram	2,058	559
Gaibanda	1,345	508
Rangpur	1,618	541
Nilphamari	1,125	268
All 4 Districts	6,146	1,876 (30.5%)

Source: PPRC Monga Research Findings, 2007

### Anti-*monga* programs: Lessons learnt

The four major anti-*monga* programs include temporary food support, temporary employment, flexible micro-credit, and asset transfer (livestock and poultry). Primary education stipend program, though not strictly an anti-*monga* program, plays a role simply by its scale. There are, however, a number of smaller programs focused on agri-diversification, shelter, training, enterprises, fisheries and, awareness-building. Many organisations have general anti-poverty programs in the region, but not specifically focused on the *monga* problem. The following lessons have emerged from the workshop:

**Lesson 1** Anti-*monga* interventions show an extensive program profile, but there is, in general, inadequate coordination of efforts as well as an absence of strong assessment of scaling up options and best practices.

**Lesson 2** There is a significant mis-match between the coverage of major safety net programs and the corresponding sizes of the target groups. Specifically, VGD coverage is significantly higher compared to target group size. The reverse is true for the VGD program, as is evident from the figures below:

#### Mis-match between VGD and VGF Program Size and Clientele

Safety Net Program	Size of Clientele For Kurigram District	Actual Size of Program in 2006: Number of beneficiaries
VGD	52334	23760
VGF	74724	180,000

Source: Clientele size is extrapolation from PPRC Sample Survey of 33 villages; Program size is information collected from official sources

**Lesson 3** Enterprise development approach has proved to be least promising from a sustainability standpoint. The major weakness of this approach has been with regard to establishing market linkage, as was brought out from the experience of Grameen Bank which initiated such an approach in Chilmari upazila in Kurigram in 2006.

**Lesson 4** While a training sub-component is added in many programs, content and subsequent utilisation remain poor. Without significant improvement in utilisable and quality content, training will remain a severely under-utilised opportunity.

**Lesson 5** Welfare, or temporary employment, is a key anti-*monga* intervention, but sustainability of this component requires activity innovations beyond dry-season earthwork only. PKSF, for example, has recently dropped this component from its anti-*monga* program on grounds of unsustainability. Current program-level debates focus on gender-sensitivity of earthwork programs, advance wage payments, sustainable wage rate etc., but search for convincing resolutions remain on-going. The shift from being mainly a government sector program (FFW by LGED/BWDB) to an NGO sector program (CFW by CLP etc) has also had the effect of weakening the linkage to durable infrastructure creation. Activity innovations such as homestead-raising are promising, but a bigger thrust on innovations and sustainability is necessary.

**Lesson 6** Adapting micro-credit through flexible rates and terms for various *monga*-affected groups shows promise, but potential disincentive for regular micro-credit clientele needs to be guarded against.

**Lesson 7** From a sustainability angle, full utilisation of local government and community capacities is critical, but such capacities remain substantially under-utilised.

**Lesson 8** An effective data-base, relevant impact indicators, and credible monitoring will be critical to ensuring progress on comprehensive *monga* mitigation. PPRC's and PKSF's comprehensive data-bases generated in 2007 provide a useful start in this direction. A regular cycle of comprehensive workshops before and after the *monga* season can galvanise the focus on monitoring.

### Missing agenda

While there is no dearth of programs, certain critical missing areas were

identified in the national policy workshop. These include:

**Physical protection:** The PPRC micro-mapping of eco-vulnerability in the *monga*-affected areas has underscored physical protection as a critical missing agenda within the anti-*monga* interventions. With 1876 villages identified as severely vulnerable, PPRC and LGED can collaborate to develop a technically sound and contextually relevant intervention package for the whole region.

**Education:** Education statistics show lower-than-national-average achievements for the *monga*-affected districts. The importance of education as a driver of change in the long run has been demonstrated in other parts of the country and needs to be urgently prioritised within the anti-*monga* strategy. In the short-term, instruments such as the primary stipend program can be scaled up to cover the whole population in the affected regions rather than the current 40% of quota limit.

**Skills and remunerative migration:** While migration from the *monga*-affected districts is quite pronounced, much of it is of a distress nature. Remunerative migration, both within and outside the country, has transformed localities in other parts of the country. For the *monga*-affected districts, this can be a critical "thinking-out-of-the-box" solution for a comprehensive anti-*monga* strategy.

**Fisheries:** Partly because ponds tend to dry up in the winter months in the northern districts, fisheries have not been seen as a potential sector. However, PPRC mapping research has identified a substantial number of perennial water bodies in districts such as Gaibanda which are amenable to community-oriented initiatives such as those pioneered in Daudkandi in Comilla. NGO-level experiments with cage culture also underscores the potential of fisheries as a critical thrust sector for a scaled-up anti-*monga* strategy.

**Shelter:** An important innovation in the 2006-07 *monga* and flood coping has focused on flood-proofing homesteads through raising them, establishment of multi-purpose shelters, and trained evacuation during flood emergencies. However, these remain quite small in scale. A scaled-up focus on the shelter issue is likely to prove quite beneficial.

**Land:** A key aspect of *monga* vulnerability is the higher-than-national-average landlessness. The national workshop brought out the fact that substantial amounts of *khas* land remain potentially available in the affected districts. Utilising the support of relevant NGOs in this regard, a major thrust can be launched to utilise *khas* land distribution for the comprehensive anti-*monga* strategy.

### Components of a scaled-up comprehensive *monga* mitigation strategy

**Livelihood diversification at both HH and local economy levels:** A three-pronged approach is called for: i) promotion of viable new agricultural crops suited to specific sub eco-systems, ii) a big-push on non-crop agriculture, in particular, fisheries and livestock, and, iii) promotion of skills and non-farm occupations which effectively link to evolving market demand.

**Improved physical protection for vulnerable micro-regions:** The PPRC micro-mapping of eco-vulnerability in the *monga*-affected districts has underscored physical protection as a critical missing agenda within the anti-*monga* interventions. With 1876 villages identified as severely vulnerable, PPRC and LGED can collaborate to develop a technically sound and contextually-relevant intervention package for the whole region.

**Better matching of safety net portfolio and target group components:** PPRC and PKSF data-bases have established a clearer profile of various target groups and their overall sizes, and it should now be possible to better match safety net coverage to required targets. Currently, VGD clientele are under-covered while VGF clientele are over-covered.

**Sustainable and scaled-up innovations in workforce/temporary employment opportunities:** In particular, the dominant focus on earthwork opportunities relevant to post-*monga* dry season needs to be supplemented by innovations on workforce opportunities relevant to the *monga* months.

**Cost-effective and viable settlement program for river-eroded and no-homestead household:** PPRC and PKSF data-bases have established the precise magnitude of these target groups. A number of GO and NGO programs have also developed promising pilot models which address the issue, but the key challenge is scaling up in a cost-effective manner. More

effective utilisation of available *khas* land resources is also a priority here. Potential of education as a long-term driver of change: In the short-term, instruments such as the primary stipend program can be scaled up to cover the whole population in the affected regions rather than the current 40% of quota limit.

**Consolidated data-base and its sharing:** PPRC-BARD 4 district monga data-base developed with the use of customised software utilising community-based poverty monitoring approaches will be available for others. Appropriate MOUs may be developed to ensure a sustainable and effective approach to sharing data-bases.

**Development of impact indicators and credible monitoring:** Both indicator development and impact monitoring need to be pursued both at project level and independent research levels. Independent national-level monitoring will be crucial to ensure credibility to the monitoring process and provide a continuous reality check on progress made.

### Institutional priorities to move beyond business as usual

**Importance of a paradigm shift:** A paradigm shift on *monga* mitigation away from a relief focus towards a comprehensive transformation of *monga* realities utilising regional data-bases developed by PPRC and PKSF as well as other sources will have to be adopted. To concretise this paradigm shift, there is a need to establish a new focal point within the government, preferably a core livelihood-related ministry such as the Ministry of Agriculture through an appropriate amendment in the Rules of Business.

**Continuity of national attention:** To ensure a continuity of high-level national attention on the issue, there is a need to establish a comprehensive *monga* mitigation national committee headed by the focal ministry advisor and constituted of key secretaries and major policy actors outside the government. The national committee will function as a public-private policy coalition. To ensure dynamism, it can be supported by dual secretariats, one within the government and one amongst the actors outside the government. The committee should specifically address the tasks of: i) motivation, ii) coordination, iii) lesson-learning, and iv) monitoring.

**Clarity on scaling up options:** The key challenge for a comprehensive mitigation strategy is to scale up viable interventions. However, while there is a plethora of programs implemented by a diverse range of local and national actors, which interventions merit scaling up is not self-evident. Establishing clarity on scaling up options through a rigorous impact analysis and lesson-learning will have to be ensured.

**Mobilising local government and community capacities:** Local government and community capacities remain substantially under-utilised in the task of comprehensive *monga* mitigation. Mobilising such capacities and creating effective scope for such local capacities should be a priority.

**Priority on monitoring outcomes:** To ensure continued national focus on the comprehensive mitigation challenge and to galvanise result-oriented monitoring, a regular cycle of pre-*monga* (late September or early October) and post-*monga* (late January or early February) national policy workshops will have to be organised. The October 1-2 national policy workshop can be seen to have jump-started this process of regular cycle of monitoring and lesson-learning events which can bring together all major actors involved in the task of *monga* mitigation. Following this schedule, a follow-up national policy workshop is planned for February 2008.

Hossain Zillur Rahman is Executive Chairman of PPRC. This article is the outcome of a national policy workshop organised jointly by PPRC, Ministry of Agriculture, PKSF, and LGED with support from DFID on October 1-2 at the LGED auditorium.

## State of PTIs in Bangladesh

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**T**EACHING is an art more than a science, so a teacher is perhaps born as a teacher more than anything else. Yet, a person born with many basic qualities of teaching or lighting candles of knowledge in others might not be a professional teacher in life, being either forced to divert into another profession or taking other responsibilities upon himself/herself.

Such people don't need any training, but there are others, who are in the majority, who need to be trained before entering this profession. Because there is no litmus test to mark distinctions between them, all born as well as not born with the

quality of teaching need to go through a teacher training course in all countries of the world. There are many training institutes in our country as well for better preparing teachers for their profession. There are also departments and institutes under various universities to study this as an academic subject.

In primary education in our

country there are 54 government and 2 privately owned teachers training institutes known as PTI. Together, they produce about 10,000 trained primary teachers, increasing their capacity by changing from single to double shift a few years back. As a result, there are few untrained teachers nowadays in government and registered non-government primary schools.

Despite this achievement, there is a common feeling that the quality of education is deteriorating. Once there were schools without roofs overhead, and a lack of facilities. Yet, great people who steered the nation, and in many positive ways influenced our lives, came out of those schools.

Are there then problems with the training provided by PTIs? Are PTIs themselves riddled with problems and struggling against worsening conditions within themselves? These are the questions to which answers were sought in a study, "Primary Teachers Training: Documenting the Existing Scenario," done by the organisation your author belongs to. Only 7 PTIs in the districts of Joypurhat, Mymensingh, Madaripur, Netrokona, Barguna, Chittagong and Sylhet came under the study. Mostly local level reporters were engaged in seeking out the existing scenarios in these institutes. And

they found some things interesting, a few significant ones are:

Because it is an in-service training C-in-Ed, the course provided by the PTI and overseen by the National Academy for Primary Education (NAPE), an autonomous body since October 2004 (and suffering from not-so-few problems), teachers have lost interest in it. They go into the course because it is mandatory, and there are, some substantial incentives involved.

Moreover, many of them lose interest because the instructors are not always as competent as the trainee teachers. Instructors at PTIs are either not available or not