Healing the Battered

DILRUBA HAIDER

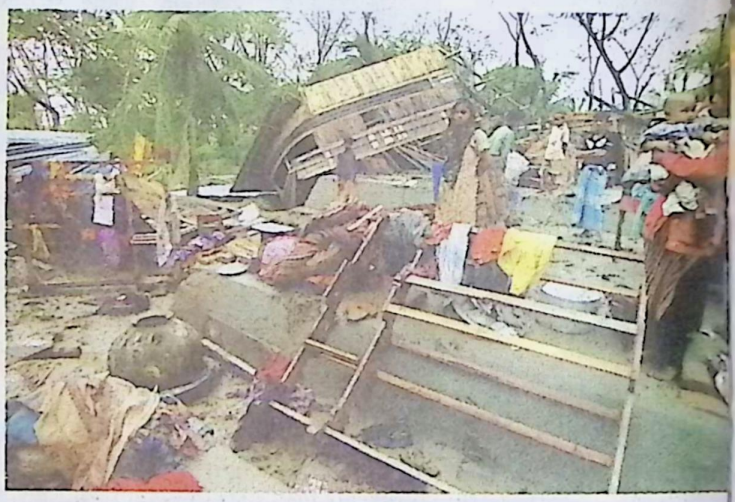
The devastating cyclone that hit Bangladesh on November 15 2007 left behind thousands of dead and survivors who are still grappling with the trauma.

Mohammad Shahidul is an 18-year-old boy from Patharghata Upazila of Borguna District, one of the worst affected areas from the super Cyclone Sidr. Shahidul, his elder brother, and their father went into thesea as they did every other day, on 12 November. Deep in the sea, the radio frequency doesn't work properly; so although they had a radio with them, they didn't get the cyclone warning messages. However, seeing the sky turn dark they became alarmed and tried coming back towards the shore. But before they could land, Sidr caught them and their trawler capsized. The three along with other fishermen swam, drifted and floated with floaters for almost two days on the Bay of Bengal and finally managed to land in the Sundarbans, which had born the brunt of Sidr; 25% of the forest was devastated. For two days they treaded the forest, with torn limbs, weak with hunger, eating kewra. The father fell sick and was completely drained of the strength and spirit to fight for his life. The two sons also had lost the necessary life in them to carry the father with them. Shahidul and his brother was numb with all the struggles, hunger and endless walking; they left their weak and ailing father behind in the Sidr-torn deep forest amidst the wild animals and went on walking ahead like two lifeless phantoms, without knowing which direction to go. Finally they reached the Indian part of the Sundarbans where two honey collectors from Bangladesh found them, took them to their place, fed them and gave them some money to come back home.

Mohommmad Shahidul, Patharghata, Borguna

Shahidul was narrating the whole thing like a story-teller and his face bore no emotion. Here was this young man who had to leave his weak, helpless father behind in the forest, and when he was telling me all this, his face was numb, eyes utterly blank! I asked him in my desperate but futile attempt to peep into his soul: is your father alive? Do you know where he is? He replied: 'we don't know'- with the same vacant look!

Aklima, a young housewife from Golachipa upazila of Patuakhali District was talking in a slightly high pitch



faster than any other rural woman of her age. She too was depicting the frightful night of 15 November: since signal number ten was announced on 14 November, and the dreadful weather got slightly better in the morning of the 15th, her brother-in-law reassured her that no tidal bore would come this time. Her uncle-in-law consoled her saying that he had seen many cyclones, nothing would happen. So she kept on blubbering the whole day but didn't go to any safer place to take shelter. The cyclone shelter was almost two kilometers away. At night when the storm took a horrific face with deafening sounds, Aklima set out for the embankment with her husband, son and daughter. As soon as they stepped out of their house the giant wave hit them and the husband with their son was snatched away from them. Aklima and her 3-year-old daughter Jannatul Ferdous were swept away by the wave in the dark. Aklima cannot remember how long she swam for, but after sometime, her body gave up, and she couldn't hold on to her daughter, and let go of her: 'having to hold on to her, I couldn't swim any more'. Jannatul however, wouldn't let go of her mother, she kept on hanging to her mother's hair: 'ma don't let go of me, take me to abba (father)'. Finally the two could clutch the top of a date tree. Mother and daughter had innumerable needles pierced through their bodies from the date and kewra trees as the waves thrashed them against the trees.