Nature's Humble Children
Opportunities from Destruction

TAHMINA RAHMAN

"But I don't have a red one" said the woman when asked why she had come to collect yet another relief blanket when she already had so many.

Sarankhola has been one of the worst affected of the regions hit by the cyclone SIDR in November of 2007. The death toll was catastrophic and destruction almost complete. The number of deaths only in Bagerhat district was 810, among the total estimated 3,363 throughout the country. The number of affected households there was 283,482; the highest in the country (source: MoFDM, Relief Control Cell, updated 27.12.2007). In Bagerhat most of the blow of the cyclone was taken by Sarankhola with Dular Char and Southkhali falling under it.



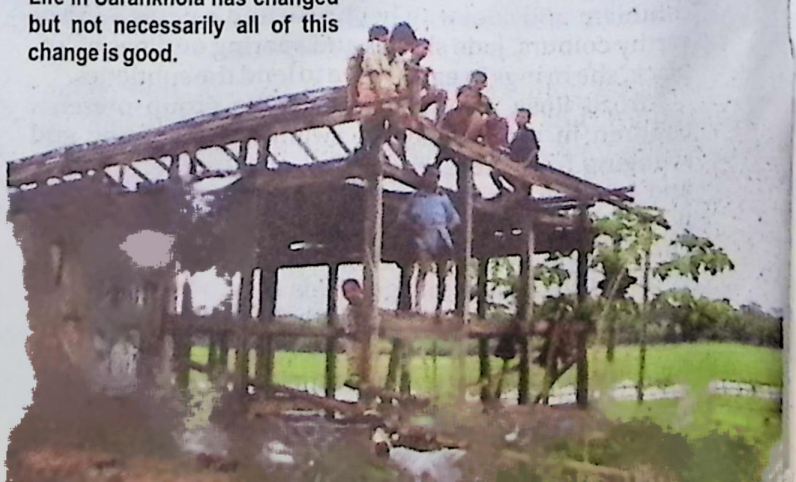
How will these houses be maintained in the future?

Life immediately after SIDR was miserable and very harsh. But gradually this situation improved. People got food and different relief items; later seeds, boats, fishing nets, rickshaw vans, cash to start small business and so on. And in the middle of the rainy season after a long period of waiting they got houses with C.I. sheet roofs that many took as blessing in return for the waiting. To have houses like these was beyond the dreams of many. Suddenly cash started to pour in this small unknown area from home and abroad. The number of NGOs working in Sarankhola jumped from only three to twenty four. Life in Sarankhola had changed.

This change has been brought by a lot of rebuilding; initially by relief, then by different short and long-term rehabilitation programmes. But looking carefully at what is happening, we can ask if it is really rebuilding? Or are the changes changing the pattern of life?

Normal life here evolves with nature. For many, the forest is directly or indirectly a part of livelihood. They collect honey, wax, wood, golpata and hogla from the forest. But after SIDR these activities have been restricted for two years to give nature time to get revitalised. The main livelihoods are fishing and agriculture. Mostly fishing is done in the wet season and agriculture during the rest of the year. People grow a lot of fruit and timber trees around the homesteads. They grow crops by storing rainwater. They are in harmony with nature in terms of their lifestyle and livelihood.





Life in Sarankhola has changed but not necessarily all of this change is good.