

Long term plan for delta management being formulated

Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 team visits Monu River Project, Hakaluki Haor and meets local stakeholders in Sylhet



The Manu River Project of Moulvibazar District is bounded by the Kushiara River on the north, the Manu River on the South and West and the Vatera Hills on the east. It encompasses 22,672 ha of land, and contributes to flood control, drainage and irrigation.

ZAHDUL NAIM ZAKARIA and SHAKER BIN SHAMS

The governments of Bangladesh and the Netherlands are working together to formulate a long term plan for management of the Bangladesh delta, known as the Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP) 2100. The formulation project is led by the General Economics Division (GED) of the Bangladesh Planning Commission. Having started in 2014, the project is expected to complete in September 2016. Between 6 and 8 May, the BDP team organized a fact-finding mission to Sylhet.

Bangladesh is the largest delta of the world. Its rivers and floodplains, which make up 80% of the country, support life, livelihoods and the economy. Bangladesh, a rapidly developing country, faces major inter-related delta challenges in water safety, food security and socio-economic development and is prone to natural calamities such as floods, cyclones, and droughts.

Although the primary objective of consultations is to listen to stakeholders about the constraints they face on a day-to-day basis and the challenges in their area, they also serve the additional purpose of stakeholder sensitization. In order to enable the government to address future challenges of delta management, the Delta Plan 2100 will develop a long-term vision of the Bangladesh Delta's future. This long-term vision, combined with the use of scenarios, will create room for adaptive and dynamic planning by constantly taking into account uncertainties in future developments in e.g. climate change, socio-economic development, population growth and regional cooperation. For the sustainability of the plan, and its future implementation, it is important for local stakeholders to know that the government has embarked upon the formulation of a 100-year plan to manage the Bangladesh delta in a way that

optimizes levels of water safety and food security, as well as sustained economic growth. Sylhet is one of many 'hotspots' identified by the project team, which also include haors (wetlands), coastal areas, drought-prone areas and urban areas of Bangladesh. Consultations are being organized at each 'hotspot'.

During the visit to the Manu River project in Moulvibazar, the team discussed the project with the Executive Engineer of BWDB at the Bangladesh Water Development Board. The Manu River Project covers the Moulvibazar Sadar and Rajnagar Upazila of Moulvibazar District. The area is bounded by the Kushiara River on the north, the Manu River on the south and west and the Vatera Hills on the east. Beginning in 1975-76, the project ended in 1982-83 and its barrage and pumping plant was constructed at a cost of 66.66 crore taka. The project encompasses 22,672 ha of land, and contributes to flood control, drainage and irrigation. With 19,278 ha cultivable land under the project (net 15,546 ha), the project provides irrigation to an area of 11,578 ha. The Monu River Project Pump Station has a 3 megawatt power demand. At the onset of the project, it had its own power supply, which was later diverted to the national grid for supply to the Palli Bidyt Shamiti (PBS). Currently, the Pump House receives electricity from REB, which is not as reliable as its own power supply.

The team also visited Hakaluki Haor, situated in Sylhet Division as well. One of Bangladesh's largest haors, it borders the Kulaura, Juri and Baralekha Upazilas under Moulvibazar District and Fenchuganj and Gopalganj Upazilas. Discussions with local stakeholders at the haor revealed that amongst many issues that are relevant to water resource management there, the most important are waterlogging, dry season water management, dry season

irrigation, high seasonal extraction of groundwater and heavy siltation in the Surma and Kushiara rivers. The total area of this haor is about 97,166 acres. Hakaluki Haor is an Ecologically Critical Area designated by the Director General of the Department of Environment. This haor is also a protected Ramsar site of international importance for the conservation and sustainable utilization of wetlands. The Hakaluki Haor offers a unique ecosystem home to many kinds of fishes, birds and animals. The team also visited the Joal Bhangra Haor Sluice Gate, Korchar Haor Cross Dam and the Langlia River Rubber Dam in order to learn about the development, implementation and impact of these interventions.

Two stakeholder consultation sessions, with the Sylhet Chamber of Commerce and Industries (SCCI) and the Sunamganj DC Office, were held. The discussion at SCCI ranged from haor management to modern agricultural systems, also touching upon credit and financing mechanisms. The need to expand social safety nets for marginalized people in the Sylhet region was stressed, as was the need to increase income-generating activities. The current fishing system still follows a 'might-is-right' structure which needs to change in order to ensure fair access to fishing. There are concerns regarding siltation in the beels: the Surma River's depth is only 2 to 3 feet in places and thus even some residential areas are flooded. Therefore, river dredging is another critical issue.

Water availability in the dry season was also discussed and the participants elaborated on trans-boundary water issues with India (Shivchar). According to most participants, public health and sanitation is a major issue in Sylhet since the district has the highest number of open latrines. Water supply for the cities, sanitation, water front development (river bank development) and urban service delivery should be major focus areas of interest. In addition to SCCI officials and the BDP mission team, the discussion was also attended by academicians from Shahjalal University of Science & Technology (SUST) and North East University Bangladesh (NEUB).

In the second consultation, the BDP mission team was joined by officials of the Sunamganj DC office and local representatives of Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), Roads and Highways Department, Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Fisheries and Livestock Department and Department of Agricultural Extension. Land and water resource management, which includes fishing, farming and agriculture, were the central themes of the discussion. The participants said that the ground water level has dropped to 1000 meter below the normal level. There is a concern over fallow land: about 60,000 ha of land is fallow in the region. The land owners, who are mostly settled abroad, leave their land unused. There is a conflict between duck farming and fish culture since mor ponds are being leased for fish culture, reducing the space available for duck farming; while indiscriminate use of pesticides are causing harm to fish breeding. Participants also expressed concerns over river sedimentation and spoke about the need to improve public health.

The Delta Plan is more than just a one-time planning exercise and aims to provide the foundation for permanent delta governance in Bangladesh through the outlining of a delta framework. This process has been successfully applied in the Netherlands, a country which faces water safety challenges similar to those in Bangladesh. The BDP 2100 project team is led by Professor Dr. Shamsul Alam, Senior Secretary to the Government of Bangladesh and Member, General Economics Division (GED), and includes Md. Mafidul Islam, Joint Chief, GED, and Project Director of BDP 2100, Dr. Taibur Rahman, Senior Assistant Chief, GED, Murtuza Zulkar Nain Noman, Senior Assistant Chief, GED, Professor Dr. Jaap de Heer, Team Leader, BDP 2100, Giasuddin Ahmed Choudhury, Deputy Team Leader, BDP 2100, Michael de Boer, Assistant Team Leader, BDP 2100, and Shaker Bin Shams, Assistant Deputy Team Leader, BDP 2100. In addition, a wide range of technical specialists from the Netherlands and Bangladesh provide their expertise to



From Left to Right: Mafidul Islam (Joint Chief, GED, Planning Commission and Project Director, BDP 2100), Professor Dr. Shamsul Alam (Senior Secretary and Member, GED, Planning Commission), Giasuddin Ahmed Choudhury (Deputy Team Leader, BDP 2100) and Professor Dr. Jaap de Heer (Team Leader, BDP 2100).



PHOTO: STAR

A baby corn field in Lalmonirhat Sadar upazila. Inset, harvested baby corn.

Baby corn farming gains popularity in Lalmonirhat

Farmers need market facility

S DILIP ROY, Lalmonirhat

Cultivation of baby corn, an item used for producing baby food, is gaining popularity in Sadar upazila of Lalmonirhat district.

An agriculture based non-governmental organisation (NGO) started farming baby corn using compost fertiliser on 215 bighas of land leased from Military Farm at Harati, Ambari, Mahendranagar, Chinipara and Saptibari villages in the upazila three years ago.

The NGO has been farming baby corn with hired local farm labourers and getting bumper output.

Many local farmers have also started growing baby corn instead of tobacco on

their lands, and many more are going to start this year. Farmers said, "We are interested in farming baby corn if we get proper marketing facility."

NGO sources said they cultivate baby corn thrice a year, and the production is plentiful. "We spend around Tk 9,000 to cultivate baby corn on one bigha of land in each period, and we earn Tk 19,000 to Tk 20,000," they said, adding that a farmer can make a profit of Tk 28,000 to Tk 30,000, farming baby corn on one bigha of land and selling his produce to the NGO each year.

Maniruzzaman Manir, agriculture supervisor of the

NGO, said they send the produced baby corn to Bhaluka in Mymensingh, where it is processed before being exported.

Mafiz Uddin, a local farmer working at the baby corn processing centre at Bhaluka, said the produce is exported to Korea, China, England and other countries.

Azizur Rahman, a local farm labourer at Harati village, said he and many other local farm labourers have been working to produce baby corn. Each of them gets daily wage of Tk 200 to Tk 250. "We never use chemical fertiliser on the farmland, we only use compost fertilisers supplied by Lalmonirhat

Military Farm," he added.

Nazrul Islam, a farmer at Saptibari village, said he cultivated baby corn instead of tobacco on two bighas of land this year, and is expecting to earn a good profit by selling the corn to the NGO. "Many farmers will leave tobacco farming and start growing baby corn if they get market facility," he added.

Safayet Hossain, deputy director of the Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE) in Lalmonirhat, said cultivation of baby corn using compost fertiliser is gradually gaining popularity in other areas of the district.

Weak Bailey bridges put commuters at risk

EAM ASADUZZAMAN, Nilphamari

Thirteen worn-out Bailey bridges across rivers intercepting different important roads belonging to the Roads and Highways department (RHD) in the district make vehicular movement highly risky.

The bridges were set up on temporary basis 20-30 years ago as replacement of old and vulnerable RCC bridges made during the British or Pakistan periods, RHD sources said.

Those are at Hortukitola on Nilphamari-Domar road, Anandobabu, Kachukata, Duhuli and Hafizia on Nilphamari-

Jaldhaka road, Auliakhana on Jaldhaka-Domar road, Modhupur on Saidpur-Taraganj road, Bahagli on Kishoreganj-Taraganj road, Gomnati and Motukpur on Domar-Chilahati road, Nautara and Thutardanga on Sutibari-Sardarer Haat road, and Ramganj on Ramganj-Mirganj road.

A Bailey bridge is designed for taking 5-10 tonnes of load but 10-wheeler trucks usually carrying 50-60 tonnes often pass through them, relevant sources said.

Two weeks ago, a 10-wheeler truck loaded with 65 tonnes of stones got

stuck in the loose steel plates of Hortukitola Bailey bridge, snapping vehicular movement on Nilphamari-Panchagarh road, said Tapon Kumar Roy, chairman of Polashbari union parishad (UP).

A month ago, a motorcyclist received serious injuries after falling from Nautara Bailey bridge as its plates had got displaced, Mosharaf Hossain, chairman of Nautara UP in Dimla upazila.

During the political unrest in 2013, Jamaat-Shibir activists displaced steel plates and unscrewed nuts and bolts of the Bailey bridges at Hortukitola,

Duhuli, Auliakhana and Hafizia, making them virtually unusable.

Tanvir Siddiquee, executive engineer of RHD in Nilphamari, said construction of new RCC bridges to replace the risky Bailey bridges and renovation of a few of them will be done in phases, if fund is available.

"Work is on to replace most vulnerable 50-metre-long and 7.3-metre-wide Hortukitola Bridge on Nilphamari-Domar road as the government allocated Tk 3.16 crore to construct a permanent RCC bridge there," he added.



PHOTO: STAR

Like several others in the district, Hortukitola Bailey bridge on Nilphamari-Domar road in Nilphamari Sadar upazila lies in a dilapidated condition, posing risk to commuters.