



A number of houses and cropland at two villages in Panchagarh's Debiganj upazila remain under water due to waterlogging since some local influential people blocked the passage of a culvert, right, four years ago.



PHOTO: STAR

100 families in Panchagarh suffer due to waterlogging

A few local influential people in Debiganj upazila block passage of a culvert

OUR CORRESPONDENT, Thakurgaon

Around 100 families of two villages in Debiganj upazila of Panchagarh district have been suffering a lot during monsoon for the last four years due to waterlogging as local influential people blocked the passage of a culvert at Charpara after building houses.

The callous act led to persistent waterlogging for over a month in every rainy season, said locals.

Apart from this, the villagers face huge losses as their croplands remained under water due to the waterlogging. Due to this, fish cultivation in the area has also been hampered.

During a recent visit, this correspondent

found that around 500 people of Charpara and Charmelapara villages in Tepiriganj union of the upazila have been passing hard days as their houses and croplands went under water.

It happened as the water flow was blocked due to blocking of the culvert in Charpara area, said the villagers.

The affected people said three local influential people -- Nur Haque, Aynal Mistri and Sultan -- built houses opposite to the villages blocking passage of a culvert in 2016.

The villagers have been suffering in every rainy season due to waterlogging since the passage of the culvert was blocked four years back. Their houses and croplands

went under water during monsoon. Even light rain caused overflowing of the water bodies in the areas.

The sufferers informed the local administration and public representatives about the matter several times but to no effect yet.

Mahir Uddin of Charpara village said people in the area have been facing untold sufferings for long due to stagnant water.

Another villager Amzad Hossain of Charmelapara area said his house remained under water during monsoon since the water flow was blocked four years ago.

"During this season, water overflowed the bank of my pond, leading to fish worth Tk 1.80 lakh escaping from the

pond," he said.

Amzad further said the affected villagers continued informing the authorities concerned about the matter but they are yet to get any solution.

Nur Haque and Aynal Mistri said finding no other alternative, they have built houses on their land.

Contacted, local union parishad chairman Golam Rahman said after receding of water, they will take step to build another culvert in the area for draining out water from the two villages.

Debiganj Upazila Nirbahi Officer Prottoy Hasan said the upazila administration will take immediate steps to resolve the problem.

YOUTH PERSPECTIVE ON COVID-19 CRISIS IN BANGLADESH REFLECTION ON NATIONAL BUDGET 2020-21

PARTICIPANTS



consideration, the rate is 29.8 percent.

11.69 percent of the total budget has been allocated for the education sector. This is 2.09 percent of the GDP that declined from 2.10 percent allocated last year.

89.2 percent of youth aged 15-29 years works in the informal sector which is worst hit by Covid-19 pandemic. The budget allocation for the Ministry of Industry has declined by eight percent; for the Ministry of Labour and Development, it has declined by 4.6 percent; and the budget for the Ministry of Expatriates' Welfare and Overseas Employment has increased by 9.4 percent. These ministries directly contribute to employment generation.

On the other hand, young people around Bangladesh should take up accountability initiatives with respect to services provided by various agencies and institutions at the local and national levels. Space should be created for young people to harness their leadership skills and involve them in development interventions, including the opportunity to contribute to the development of the local and national budget. Such engagement of young people should always be in the arena of research and knowledge building. Finally, we all should disseminate positive messages and carry out campaigns to prompt positive change and challenge the trend of moral degradation.

Farah Kabir, Country Director, ActionAid Bangladesh and Chair of the session

Community clinics and one-stop centres should be set up for young people to provide COVID-19 related information and services. The government should invest more in the healthcare system, infrastructure, and workers, particularly in young nurses, paramedics and ward boys.

For the efficient use of the increased amount of social safety net budget, the excluded and marginalised groups should be focused on and brought under the social safety net (SSN). Hence, an adequate amount of SSN must be allocated for females, differently abled people, Dalits, sex workers, cleaners, transgender community, adibashi, etc.

In terms of social issues, child marriage is rampant across the country and has caused many young girls to drop out of education, become mothers at an early age and forgo their contributions to the country and their development. The pandemic has harmed these girls and young mothers in multiple aspects of their wellbeing. We must work on improving their health and provide them with psycho-social support. Policies and interventions by the government at all levels should include them in regard to skills development and reskilling programmes.

Considering the relevance of the global markets, reviving the micro economy of the country is important. An enabling environment should be created for young people so that they can pursue economic activities and have a livelihood.

On the other hand, young people around Bangladesh should take up accountability initiatives with respect to services provided by various agencies and institutions at the local and national levels. Space should be created for young people to harness their leadership skills and involve them in development interventions, including the opportunity to contribute to the development of the local and national budget. Such engagement of young people should always be in the arena of research and knowledge building. Finally, we all should disseminate positive messages and carry out campaigns to prompt positive change and challenge the trend of moral degradation.

Nazmul Ahsan, Manager-Young People, ActionAid Bangladesh

According to the Labour Force Survey 2016-17, the number of working youths, aged 15 to 29, is 41.3 million, making up 31.6 percent of the total labour force. 79.6 percent of all unemployed people are youth. The average rate of unemployment is 4.2 percent, but when the youth are taken into consideration, the rate stands at 10.6 percent. If the NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) population is taken into

rural areas.

Young people must be able to borrow money from banks without collateral, so that they can start their businesses.

Zaiba Tahyya, Founder, Female Empowerment Movement (FEM)

COVID-19 is triggering gender-based violence and with the rise of unemployment rate, the violence will surely increase. The government should identify the issue and deploy emergency responders to help the sufferers. Is there any budget allocation for the safety of women and children, since there is a lack of proper budget in this sector?

Jesmin Akter Jui, Grassroots Activist, Activista Bangladesh

Grassroots youth are facing numerous challenges ranging from child marriage to mental and physical distress. Many young people have lost their sources of income. These must be included in the budget.

Alimuzzaman, Grassroots Activist, Activista Bangladesh

The government should allocate more budget in the education and skill development sector and less in the infrastructure development amid COVID-19 crisis.

Munir Hasan, Head, Youth Programme, Prothom Alo

Students are unable to buy internet regularly for online classes. Therefore, BRTC's social obligation fund can be used to ensure internet access for the marginalised young people in rural areas.

Ejaj Ahmad, Founder and President, Bangladesh Youth Leadership Center (BYLC)

Promotion of online classes amid COVID-19 is contributing to furthering educational gap. Thus, an uninterrupted internet connection must be ensured in

The government can create some educational websites or provide free public internet access, particularly for the youth of our country, since internet is inaccessible in rural areas.

Due to COVID-19, we are observing widespread unemployment. We need to create more entrepreneurs and open financing opportunities for the youth. We must also emphasise on developing technological and language skills among our youth since the lack of these skills have held us back in certain sectors.

Sarah Kamal, National President, JCI Bangladesh

Mental health is degrading with the increase in unemployment. This degradation in mental health will lead to increased crime, violation and suicide rate. Besides, newer facilities for youth, such as gyms, sports facilities, cycling tracks, etc., are needed as urbanisation has led to a decrease in open spaces.

Jannatul Mawa, Grassroots Activist, Activista Bangladesh

We must acknowledge the contribution of young women farmers in the national budget.

Kishwar Hashemee, CEO and Co-founder, Kludio

This pandemic has given us the realisation that being physically present at work to prove competency will not be mandatory anymore, even in the global market.

The startups in Bangladesh can potentially contribute around two percent to the country's GDP this year and the coming year. However, most of

these startups will have to shut down because they are in dire conditions now. This poses a great risk, especially for the infrastructure that startups have created all these years for implementing Digital Bangladesh. Therefore, we must incentivise and create access to finance for startups.

Ismat Jerin Khan, Managing Director, JERMATZ LTD and Director, SME Foundation

The government, along with other stakeholders, can work together to support the small business so that these small businesses can survive. We can create a link-up policy between small and big entrepreneurs through government support. We must also combine the research sector with the business and the health sectors. We can involve the educated youth who can help to establish the research sector as an industry itself.

Dr Ananya Raihan, Executive Chairperson, Dnet and CEO, Infolady Social Enterprise Limited

The need for universalisation of social protection. Due to institutional weaknesses for social protection, the government's fund allocation in different sectors are not being channelled properly.

The private sector alone cannot resolve the current unemployment issue. So, we can create an unemployment benefit scheme nationally.

Mohibul Hassan Chowdhury, MP, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Education

country in this regard. The government must take significant initiatives for these health-related skills development programmes.

If not long-term, then at least a temporary employment guarantee scheme or targeted employment guarantee scheme should be established. There has been no reflection on this matter in the national budget, but there is still time for incorporating it.

Dr Atiur Rahman, Professor, Department of Development Studies, University of Dhaka and Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank

The government should immediately start a robust credit guarantee scheme. Women entrepreneurs and the youth should be given the highest priority in this scheme. Until this is set up, Bangladesh Bank can form partnerships with banks and ensure loans reach villagers through MFIs.

Bangladesh Bank should clarify that now is the high time for corporate social responsibility (CSR) from private groups. The Honourable Prime Minister has provided 2500 crore taka to the informal sector. This amount should be increased and provided for longer period.

Nahim Razzaq, MP, Member of Parliamentary Standing Committee, Foreign Affairs and Co-chair, UNYSAB Trustee Board

Twenty-two different ministries are responsible for matters related to the youth of Bangladesh. It is essential that

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Ensure universal access to digital devices and internet
- Improve the technical and vocational training for the youth. Improvise on language skills as well
- Cater to youth's mental health and wellbeing
- Establish a temporary or targeted employment guarantee scheme and include it in the national budget
- A robust credit guarantee scheme should be immediately set up by the government
- Positive imaging and rebranding of

the nursing profession are needed

➤ Provide graduates with skills training based on the current and upcoming market demands

➤ Involve youth in voluntary work during the COVID-19 crisis

➤ Allocate more budget for women and youth. Include women farmers in the national budget

➤ Provide financial access and other benefits to help startups survive as well as to encourage new startups

➤ Take stronger action against domestic violence

these ministries work towards making dreams a reality for our youths through an inclusive approach and proper policy implementation.

In Bangladesh, however, matters such as mental health, communication and skill development do not receive the required support from the government, leaving them outside the budget allocation programme. Even if we accept new ideas, no effective campaigns accompany them.

We cannot, anymore, be a country which allocates all its focus and resources to one industry.

I do not support the recent increases in taxes for internet users because it is a disincentive to customers, and it does not promote the IT sector in a positive manner.