

The worst affected, as always

Climate change is harsher on women in coastal areas



PINAKI ROY AND DIPANKAR ROY, *Khulna*

In May last year, 40-year-old Sunita Das, from Gatrigheri village of Khulna's Koyra, lost her home to cyclone Yaas. More than 50 villages in Koyra were submerged, and around 45 metres of the flood control dam of Shakbaria river in Gatrigheri were washed away at the time.

Sunita's entire village was inundated by the salinated river water. Ninety-two families, including hers, had to take shelter on the road and live in thatched houses made out of polythene and golpata (nipa leaves).

Sunita said that they had to live

A large number of the country's population has been impacted by the phenomenon, and women, like Sunita, have been the most affected.

For the first time, a survey was conducted on the financial impact of climate change on Bangladesh's people, conducted on 3,095 households in 10 districts. The report of a UNDP survey, titled 'Bangladesh Climate Change Household Expenditure Survey', revealed that women are worse affected than men when it comes to the impact of such disasters. More than 42 percent of households were affected by floods and more than 40 percent by storms or tidal surges.

On the other hand, salinity has become another major cause of concern leading to a scarcity of drinking water in the coastal area.

Mitu Sana, a resident of Gunari village in Khulna's Dakop, moved here from Koyra after her marriage eight years ago.

"I have to go to the other end of the village with a pitcher to fetch drinking water. It takes one and a half hours to fetch water from the pond. I need to make the trip twice a day," said Mitu.

Mitu's husband and her brother-in-law are both day labourers, and her father-in-law is too old to carry the pitcher and make the trip twice a day to collect water.

"So I have to do this job every day. It is a huge crisis," said Mitu.

Under UNDP's Gender-responsive Coastal Adaptation (GCA) project,

As a country that is constantly prone to natural disasters, Bangladesh has become particularly vulnerable with the onset of climate change. Human-made crises – like the withdrawal of river water and shrimp cultivation in enclosures – make matters even worse.

a survey revealed that in 74 percent of 66,234 households in Khulna and Satkhira, women are solely responsible for fetching drinking water in the coastal districts, Khulna and Satkhira. In 16 percent of the households, men also fetch water besides women, while men have taken the sole responsibility of this chore in only 10 percent of the households.

It is not just the crisis of drinking water that the people must deal with. They must face multiple disasters: frequent cyclones, salinity intrusion and waterlogging due to the collapse of

the river embankments.

And the situation gets worse every day as predicted by climate scientists.

A new report published by Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), released on February 28, 2022, reveals that Bangladesh could lose more than a tenth of its lands to the rise in sea level within two decades, potentially forcing 15 million of its 165 million population to find new homes.

The report also predicted that agricultural production would reduce between 31 and 40 percent by this century as the sea level rises.

Rawshan Ara Begum, one of the lead authors of the IPCC report, said the rise of sea level could cause a loss between 2 and 9



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Sunita Das, Koyra, Khulna



percent of the annual GDP by the middle and end of the century.

Earlier, another report by the American Geophysical Union published in 2018, predicted that Bangladesh's southern regions along the Bay of Bengal will be the first to be impacted by sea-level rise, causing displacement that would eventually affect all of the nation's 64 districts. And as usual, women are the most vulnerable when it comes to this crisis as well.

Firoza Sana (43) used to live in Mandarbari village, a few kilometres away from Sunita's village. Losing her home due to river erosion, Firoza, along with her parents and children, moved to Khulna city three years ago. She currently lives in Dakkhin Palli near Khulna town.

CONTINUED TO PAGE J2



Mitu Sana, Dakop, Khulna

PHOTO: HABIBUR RAHMAN

under the open sky till January.

"We have an acre of cultivable land. But we cannot cultivate anything due to severe salinity. We do not have a livelihood other than fishing in the river," said Sunita, when asked about the current situation.

"We would leave if we could just sell this piece of land. But no one wants to buy it," she added.

And this is not a one-off tale of misfortune. The dam got washed away during cyclone Aila in 2009 as well, as a result of which the area was underwater for about two years. According to Sunita, her village was inundated at least five times in the last 25 years, mostly due to floods and cyclones. It has been a constant battle of losing everything and building it back again from scratch.

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