THE STATE OF CHAR EDUCATION IN BANGLADESH: FOCUS ON SELECTED CHARs OF GAIBANDHA DISTRICT

ROMINA DEWAN KABIR

Abstract: Bangladesh, a 147,570 square kilometer area with a population of nearly 130.20 million is a low-lying, tropical country composed of the flood plains and delta of three rivers, the Brahmaputra / Jamuna, the Ganges/ Padma and the Meghna. Due to the monsoon rainfall and the silt carried by these three rivers, rivers as they flow from the Himalayas to the Bay of Bengal. Char s are areas of new land formed through the continual process of erosion and deposition in the major rivers and coastal areas. Char land areas irrespective of their geographic attachment to the mainland and distance from the growth centers are particularly vulnerable to floods, drought and river erosion. To identify the option and opportunities of the education provision of the char dwellers a research study was conducted selecting four chars of Gaibandha district. A number of standard approaches for information collection and analysis were used including review of number of other studies, char programme design and concept paper to get a better understanding of the char. This article is mainly based on the findings of the study. The study found the underlying problems in the Char areas. The Char dwellers are the poorest people in Bangladesh for obvious reasons. In addition to the major physical risks associated with the rivers, char-dwellers in particular are marginalized from the benefits of mainland people for their poor communication networks. The char dwellers are some of the million people who live on the island and attached river chars. They have very limited access to public or private sector provision such as healthcare, education, banking or policing. The study focussed its attention on the education and found various problems faced by the char dwellers which emerged due to communication and mobility problem of the char dwellers. Despite of so many challenges it was interesting to find that they do not wanted to be deprived of their basic education right and wanted to avail them.

Introduction

Bangladesh, a 147,570 square kilometer area with a population of nearly 130.20 million is a low-lying, tropical country composed of the flood plains and delta of three rivers, the Brahmaputra / Jamuna, the Ganges/ Padma and the Meghna. Despite being heavily dependant on agriculture, majority of the people (about 56.6 percent households) either does not have any land or own land less than half acre. 47.5 percent of the population cannot achieve 2122 k/calorie (which constitute the recommended poverty line) in their daily diet.

The country is extremely disaster prone. Catastrophic flood, droughts and cyclones occur regularly. They destroy human life properties and infrastructure and interrupt normal functioning of the society. Particularly they affect the poorer and marginalized groups more severely. Pushed by the landlessness, the marginalized groups often live in social and geographic isolation - e.g. in char areas and slums. Chars are areas of new land formed through the continual process of erosion and deposition in the major rivers and coastal areas. Char land areas irrespective of their geographic attachment to the mainland and distance from the growth centers are particularly vulnerable to floods, drought and river erosion. They have a dynamic environment that includes cycles of both erosion and accretion. It creates uncertainties and environmental instability that inhibits development interventions and in turn, traps localities into a stagnant or poorly developed economy.

Some of the Island chars are up to 40 years old but others have more recent histories. The whole of the char land is unstable and prone to annual flooding. An estimated 6.5 million people live on the Chars and associated erosion and flood prone areas which are 5% of the total population of Bangladesh, 5 million on the main river char lands and the rest (approximately 2 million) on the coastal chars. Char dwellers are effectively landless (either have owned no land or having lost land in the river, have access to little or poor quality land). With the highest density of population (882 persons per square kilometers) in the world and
slow economic progress, the people of this country are trapped in the vicious cycle of poverty. Over 50% of the people who live below the poverty line are deprived of their basic needs. Char dwellers have very limited access to public and private service provision such as health care, education, banking etc. While people seem to expect many public services and assistance from local government officials, their links with local government offices are very weak and the few services provided are of poor quality.

Objective of the study
To identify the option and opportunities of the education provision of the char dwellers a research study was conducted selecting four chars of Gaibandha district.

- To get an overview of the existing GOB & NGO education provision in chars of the project area with demographics and the char dwellers perception about these services.
- To identify people’s stated need in the chars (parents, guardians, children and adult learners)
- To explore the opportunities, directions and barriers for extending education intervention of GOB & NGO.

Methodology
A number of standard approaches for information collection and analysis were used including review of number of other studies, char programme design and concept paper to get a better understanding of the char. Different PRA tools like education mobility mapping, focus group discussion, transact walk, semi structured interview has explored their stated education needs in the chars and perception of the char dwellers on existing education services and char dwellers agreed grant access to the members of the study team which ultimately made the study possible. A combination of PRA (Participatory Rural Appraisal) methods were used to gain an understanding of a specific aspect of life on the Chars. The study also draws on our own observation and involvement with the char people. This study there fore sought information from the grey literature of project documents and other studies in char. Agencies( GO & NGO) helped to identify realities, needs, problems and potentials in chars through force field analysis and SWOT analysis. Informal interview with the government officials and leading national NGOs personnel and reputed local NGOs personnel working in char gave a insight of existing and planned education system in the char. Case studies and photographs helped to perceive the char life.

Background Information on Gaibandha District
Gaibandha is one of 64 districts of Bangladesh, and is made up of 7 upazillas, Sundarganj, Sadullapur, Gaibandha Sadar, Polashbari, Fulchari, Saghata, Gobindagonj and 82 unions. It has a total population of 2,117,959 with a sex ratio of 101 men for every 100 women. The growth rate of the population according to the 1991 census is 3.8. They’re a total of 493,101 households and the average household size is 4.3.

Out of Total population of Gaibandha, there are 641,142 char dwellers, which make up 30.3% of the total population. The percentage of char land varies by Upazilla in Gaibandha, with 80% of Sundarganj being char land, 90% of Fulchari, 40% of Gaibandha Sadar and 30 % of Sagatha Upazilla. Two upazilas were purposefully selected from those seven considering high coverage and comparatively low coverage of char land- Fulchori with 90% and Gaibandha Sadar with 40%.

Overview of GoB and NGO Education Provision in Gaibandha
The Total Literacy Movement (TLM) of DNFE is completed in Gaibandha. There fore officially 100% literacy (11-45) has been achieved. However, in some areas the second phase i.e. 3 months post literacy phase was running during the study. Before TLM DNFE implemented adult literacy programme through NGOs. TLM is run by a committee headed by District controller involving community, local government, and other government service providing agencies. It is a primer-based programme in group
teaching method. There are some Gram Shikkha Milan Kendra as continuing education center.

There are government primary school, registered primary school, high school and colleges as formal education provisions in Gaibandha. Most of these provisions are in main land except some government primary schools and some registered primary schools in the chars. Very few chars have high schools and colleges. Char dwellers had to travel to the main land for high school and college.

All most all-leading national NGOs are working in Gaibandha like BRAC, PROSHIKA, Grameen Bank, ASA, RDRS. There are many local NGOs also in the district. Most of the national NGOs are working in the mainland. BRAC has huge education programme in Gaibandha like non-formal primary education centre, adolescent education centre, School library programme, Community library but nothing for char. Only a few local NGOs are working in the char and even fewer offer education programmes. GUK runs only 20 non-formal primary education centres in the chars in the district which covers only 600 children. Some other local NGOs like Akota, SKS run also only NFPE programme supported but very inadequate.

**Brief Summary of the Chars**

For the purpose of the study different types of chars were selected as sample like duba chars (island chars – access is only possible by crossing a water body even in the dry season) Kuler chars (attached char that is accessible with out crossing a major river channel) and unprotected river banks. The selection criterion also looked at more settled and eroded chars, having some development programme and having lesser development programme. Finally the following five chars were selected as sample for the field work study: (a) Gaibandha Sardar (Kunderpara and Pardiara) and (b) Fulchari (Ratanpur, Kalasona and Kabilpur).

**General Problems Faced by the Char Dwellers**

- Char dwellers have very limited access to public or private service provision such as healthcare, education, banking or policing.
- Lack of physical security, whether in the community, while fishing on the river or at home is a major cause of vulnerability.
- While people seem to expect many public or private service and assistance from the local government officials, their links with local government offices are very weak and the few services provided are of poor quality.
- Communities living in the chars and riverbanks are very vulnerable to environmental risks such as land erosion by the river, floods, droughts, and storms.
- Adolescent girls and women on their own seem to be very vulnerable to physical attacks and sexual harassment and women mention the risk of domestic violence, particularly poor households in the seasons when there is most scarcity.
- Households with few assets, particularly limited physical and financial assets, both de jure or defacto women headed households, adolescent, unmarried girls, elderly people without family to support them, fishermen and communities living on the island or attached chars have very restricted employment and income generation opportunities, restricted mobility or access to services and are physically vulnerable and experience social discrimination in various forms. Social discrimination is best understood as not having many rights, whether it is the right to physical safety, employment opportunities, social protection or the right to participate in decision-making arenas such as the local shalish.

**Key Findings and Analysis**

**Erosion and Topology**

There is a saying especially in the char areas

“River erodes one bank and construct the other bank – this is the play of river.”

Erosion and char go together. It is a part of char life. Chars are areas of new land formed through the continual process of erosion and deposition in the major rivers and coastal areas. Erosion is largely unpredictable catastrophic livelihood shock through which household loose their land, their shelter and
other assets. In a lifetime a char dweller can experience moving to several chars for erosion, the number depends on the nature of the river adjacent to char they live. When a char starts eroding suffering of those char dwellers is enormous. They lose almost every physical and social asset. They lose their community bondage as once a char erodes. The dwellers move to different places and make different community. It’s like replanting and starting life again almost from zero. They need to find new shelter, new schools for their children, new arrangement for livelihood, establish new social relation. On the other hand annual cycle of monsoon and drought is regarded by char dwellers as a ‘way of life’ and they adopt a range of strategies which enable them to cope (within limit) with seasonal variation.

90% of char Kabilpur of Fulchori upazilla has been eroded recently. There were 296 households there but due to erosion only 9/10 households were there during the study, the rest of the households have taken shelter in different chars. Among them 65 households moved to the neighboring char Kalasona temporarily. May be some of the others settled in new chars. When a new char emerge few of them get settled for the first instance and as the char grows older and becomes stable gradually other people come to settle. The school going children of this eroded char faces difficulty to continue their study. Some of them get admitted into different schools. The school is shifted to a nearby new char. The problem is expressed by one of the Char dwellers as:

I have experienced moving my house 10-12 times from different chars. I had plenty of lands but I have lost all my land. The river grasped all my lands. I used to live from the production of my own land and now I am a wage labourer. Because of the falling economic condition and frequent movement from one char to another I couldn’t continue my children’s education. I visited the char Kunderpara, my son in laws house, they have a flood shelter, so that they don’t need to move during the flood. If we get a flood shelter like that our life would be changed. – Abdur Rashil, Char Kalasona, Fulchori.

Due to regular flooding no big trees grow in chars. So usually it look less green. Some char land is fertile because flood in every year brings new fertile soil but many of the char land is totally sandy. As most of the houses are thatched house they need renovation after 2/3 months water logging every year. It is very hot in summer and cold in winter because of the low population density, less number of trees and sandy soil. Char dwellers harvest one main crop in a year. They grow vegetable for their subsistence and they catch fish from the river. Fish is easily available just immediate after the flood.

**Comminucation**

The chars-dwellers in particular are marginalized from the benefits of mainland people for their poor communication networks. A key dimension of the physical environment is the isolation of Char Dwellers from the government services, from market from NGOs and from each other—which results from poor to non-existent transport and communications links within the chars. There are number of transport services on the chars that are run by private operators. The main forms are boat, followed by bullock carts and rickshaw vans. In Bangladesh the most common boats are country boats and this is the case along Northern Jamuna. They range from 15 to 30 m long and can carry 5-20 tonnes. The majority of boats are operator owned. There are also smaller boats that are privately owned and are small as 5m long. These boats are used for short trips. All the chars visited had a primary school. The catchment for the schools covers a wide disbursed population, therefore travel times vary. During the dry season they can be between five minutes and one hour, the predominant mode is by foot. During the wet season this changes as the majority of children have to use boats to go to school. Secondly many of the mainland teachers will not travel to the chars, as they perceive the boats to be unsafe. These two factors combined mean that many of the schools are closed during the wet season.

It was found that communication is the major problem for the Char dwellers, which has a direct and indirect impact on
education as well as all other issues. Due to communication problem they are deprived of all the facilities of the mainland people and face the following problem:

Compelled to Hire “Proxy” Teacher

The numbers of boats are very less. The larger commercial boats are used for transporting cargo along the Jamuna. Due to insufficient numbers of boats, it is not possible for the teachers to come to school regularly, especially during the wet season. So they hire teachers living in that particular char to work as their substitute whom they call “Proxy teachers”. Maximum qualifications of these teachers are of eighth grade. They think these teachers not only take classes in their absence but they are also very regular in attendance and they rely on them.

Late Attendance of Teacher

The teachers who do not go for hiring a proxy teacher are most of the time late in the school. The teachers had to wait for a boat to carry them with other people paying taka 10/- each. Even if they get a boat, the boatman does not want to take risk if the weather is not favourable or there is cloud in the sky. During the FGD with the students it was seen that the students were relaxed even during their exam day knowing that the teachers will not be coming in due time.

Visit of the Assistant Upazilla Education Officer (AUEO)

“Government has given responsibility to the UEO’s and AUEOs but we did not see them for last 5 months” expressed by one of the SMC chairperson of Government Primary school. It was found that the reason behind this was that lots of time is spend in travelling to visit a school rather than spending time in the school. Moreover, the time they go for visit it is difficult to share any boat with others as the normal timing is in the morning. So they have to hire a boat alone which becomes very expensive for them.

Less Number of NGO Education Programme

Although NGOs are present in some areas of the chars, by their own estimate they cover no more than 30% of char. Compared with the classroom teaching in GoB school, the NGO school classroom teaching is of high demand in the char but as it takes whole the day monitoring only one school in the char the NGOs have very less number of education programme in the char.

Children can not go to High School

“We do not have any high school so after completing primary school our girl children can not go to high school by crossing the river and also few boy can go because they have to arrange lodging to stay on the other side of the river and can not travel everyday. It is also not easy to get a lodging” mentioned by SMC vice chairperson of one of the GPS during an interview. The children especially boys are very interested to continue study but as the high school is in the mainland very less number of children (less than 20%) can continue or go to high school.

It is observed from the interview with the SMC member as well as from the FGD with the children that even though they are interested to continue study they can not as most of them are very poor and can not afford to go to the mainland or arrange lodging or travel everyday. It is a major problem especially for the girls. The adolescent girls feel shy to go to High school with the boys if it is not in their own char.

Migration and Mobility

Char population is very mobile. In and out migration is a continuous process. In a lifetime char dwellers may experience of moving to several chars, the number of which will depend upon the nature of river adjacent to char they live. As a new char emerge on first instance few might get settled, as the char grow older and become stable others join. Seasonal migration, especially by men, in search of job is a regular event. Char dwellers had to migrate almost every year. Different types of migration were found in different chars in Gaibandha. Every year during the flood char dwellers migrate from their houses for 2/3 months depending on the duration of the flood. The schools remain close because of the water logging and most of the
teachers from the mainland can’t come which hampered the flow of learning practice. The water logging also damages the school house and it takes time to renovate. Some time it takes months to renovate. This seasonal mobility causes destruction in the children education. Char people’s mobility is high. Chars have less education facilities they need to go out of the char for any service. Most of the chars have no high school, so the need to travel to the main land to attend high school and also for other education services. The students become irregular in the school. The NGOs are discouraged to work as they loose their target number of children (30/33 varies as per NGO) for their NFPE programme.

**Education**

Even though, the education seems not to be the main or basic need of the char dwellers but it was found that most of the char dwellers are very interested for education. Most of the people felt the need to have high school in the chars.

**Primary Education**

Most of the chars have GoB primary education schools. Very few NGOs have NFPE in the char due to communication and migration problem as mention above. But compared to the GoBs formal school most of the char dwellers of different age preferred the NGOs teaching learning system as they think that children learn more from these schools. It was observed in three chars out of five visited chars, where both GoB and NGO schools are working. In the contrary, the community people from the Kalashona and Kabilpur are happy with the GoB primary school. FGD reveals that most of the children go to primary school. As there is no high school in this char children go to Madrasah after completing primary school. There is one NGO primary school run by Gono Unnayan Kendra an Education support programme (ESP) of BRAC. However, very few children go to this NGO school. The reason may be that the NGO school started working in this char very recently and most of the children were already going to the primary school, they are not very much aware of NGO school system. Therefore, they can not compare the education system of both the schools.

It was found from the FGD with the adolescent girls of Baniapara (Ratanpur) that the teaching learning system of NGO is not only the main attraction for the NGO school but as they can skip two years (class IV and V) after completing class III from NGO school and are able to admit themselves to high school is the main attraction.

Evidence from the FGD with the Kunderpara community people reveals that compared with the NGO school the GoB school teacher has to control almost double the student (55 –60) in one class. Moreover, as there is shortage of classroom they have to take 3 classes in one classroom that is minimum 150 (50 x3) student in one classroom. Due to this reason the teachers as well as the children are not motivated to come to school and it is not possible to practice good teaching learning system.

The FGD, school observation and interview reveals that the teachers of NGO schools are comparatively regular, active and responsible. A women group told in frustration that “The GoB school teachers are not carrying out their duties or responsibilities. Our children are not serious about their education or do not want to go to school, as they do not find the school very attractive. They do not listen to us if we ask them to go to school. But the teachers never took initiative to come (Home visit) to inquire about the reason of non-attendance or motivate them like the NGO school teachers do.” Saleha a senior woman and an adult literate of FGD group narrates that:

*One of my sons used to go to primary school but was very irregular. He studied there from class I to III. Seeing his irregularity, we admitted him in Madrasah. He studied there for one year. During one year no teachers from that school came to inquire about him. As the Huzur (Teacher) of that Madrasah went away. I have no option but to admit my son to that school again after one year in class three.*

*Saleha, Baniapara, Ratanpur*

Most of the Teachers of these NGO schools are from the locality and they are strictly monitored by their supervisor.
Whereas the teachers from the GoB schools had to come from the mainland. In most cases, this irregular Teacher hires a teacher or in some chars SMCs take the initiative to recruit the teacher from the locality. The locally hired teacher was found to be comparatively less qualified than the SMC recruited teacher. However, both of them were found to be regular and sincere than the GoB recruited teachers. The salary of the hired teachers is being paid by the teachers from their salary whereas the salary of the SMC recruited teacher is paid by selling wheat they get from FFE programme. That is why the children are deprived of their quantity of wheat provided by the GoB. In some cases they do not get anything at all. As per the community people’s view, the FFE programme in the char do not have any positive impact on the quality of education rather it is hampering the quality of education.

Regarding the achievement of learning outcome or the curriculum it was revealed that the community people are happy with what they are learning and found the curriculum relevant but due to water logging almost for three months it is not possible for them to finish the curriculum in due time. As most of the parents are not that much educated they can not teach their children or support their children. As expressed by an adolescent girl that “due to water every year the school can not finish the curriculum. We have to finish ourselves. Those who have educated brothers can only take the help of their brother. But others can not.”

Shuili Akhter: Age 14 years : Baniapara, Ratanpur
She is studying in class 9. She has three brothers. Elder brother is a graduate. One brother is a HSC student; another one is in class ten. Her brothers take care of her studies when there is water. Her mother and father both of them completed adult literacy programme. They are very concern about her studies. She is getting 40% marks in the school and is very happy with that. Most of the time she tried to contribute in the discussion.

While addressing these issues most of the char dwellers felt the need of a good GoB school where there is NGO teaching system. As all the GoB school whether GPS or RNGPS in the visited char has only one classroom to teach two/three classes at a time, construction of more classroom was very much felt by them. They advised that to improve the quality of education providing wheat should be stopped and materials and teaching aids should be provided to the schools. To address the issue of water logging the children and even the community people felt the need of embankment. The women of Kabilpur char being concern for their children’s education thought the curriculum to be too overloaded for the children. Considering the school to be closed for three months as a natural phenomena they advised to reduce the curriculum so that the children are able to study within short time. In all the studied char they FGD group felt the need of high school in their char to continue their children education. Even all the children and the adolescent felt the need of high school in their char.

Adolescent Education
It is observed that most of the adolescent girls in the(chars get married at an early age. There are many reason behind this early marriage. In none of the char there is any adolescent education programme or exclusive education for this group as adolescent age group is included in the adult group (11 to 45). It was revealed from the FGDs of all the group that girls compared to boys can not go to high school due to communication problem. They even feel shy to study with the boys more they grow up. That is why they empasized with their mother to learn some skills like tailoring or sewing. In Kabilpur char most of the girls after completion of primary school or in some chars before that, go to Madrasah. Children going to Madrasah and lack of high school may have some indirect effect on girls early marriage. Because the teaching in Madrasah is very strict. Though they teach English, Bangla and Maths side by side other religious subjects but the syllabus or curriculum is totally different from the GoB primary or high school. They give emphasis on religious teaching which are very rigid. For their rigidity Government recognizes their education up to intermediate or higher secondary level (Alim)*, only. Fazel pass which is equivalent to Degree or graduation can only get job as Religious Teacher in high school.
Moreover, as the males have to stay out of the char for their livelihood or work the females having daughter feel in secured bringing up their daughter alone. They force their daughter to marry.

**Moiphul: Char Kabilpur**

Married at the age of 13. Married for 3 years. She studied till class IV. Sometimes go to madrasah. Wanted to study more but forced to get married as her mother and father did not feel secured bringing up their daughter. Her parents had to pay an amount of taka 12,000/- as dowry. She has 4 brothers, 2 sisters. 2 sisters are married. They did not study much. Though she has education till class IV, she did not get a good husband who can take care of her. In the contrary, Moiphul’s parents have to look after both of them. Moiphul’s mother in law tortures her as they can not provide the husband a job or can not pay the rest amount of the dowry.

The char people are still not very much aware of girl’s education. It was very transparent from the FGD with adolescent girls. Out of seven, only one girl (Shuili) was able to continue study according to age. May be having an adult literate parent and educated brother has direct impact on her education. It is interesting to note that, rest of the girls though studying in primary does not fall into the school age (6-10) children age group. Moreover they still have some traditional beliefs, which also leads to early marriage of these girls. Male dominant society is still very much prominent in the chars. (*Case study of Moipur.*)

Whether it is a mainland attached char or island chars women are not very much aware of school activity, SMCs, or their role as mother. However, the situation is little better in the mainland char in regard to sending children to school.

**Moipur, age 15, Baniapara, Ratanpur**

She got married at the age of 14. She has one brother and three sisters. Brother is doing agriculture work. Elder sister got married early at the age of 12. Younger sister goes to Proshikha School in Beparipara. None of them went to Government primary school. They like to go to Proshikha School. Husband is from Ratanpur. He is a Rikshapullar in Dhaka. He comes after one or two months. When she was asked whether she is interested to continue study she said that she wants to study but needs her husband’s permission for that because “husband has right to give permission for everything after marriage.” She feels bored doing nothing. She wants to study or learn some skill, like tailoring or sewing to spend her time.

Most of the adolescent groups mainly girls in the discussion expressed their need to have a separate education programme for them or a high school in their para. They with their parents also emphasized to have skill training with the education as they can not go to high school to continue their studies with the boys. They are forced to get married at an early age resulting in divorce.

**GoB and NGO Relationship**

Besides GoB few local NGOs are working in the chars. NGOs have a very good understanding among themselves. Overlapping of NGO intervention is rare. They consult among themselves about their intervention, expansion plan and location. NGOs working in Gaibandha has a network that helps in learning and sharing. Even though few local NGOs are working in the chars but they have a very good understanding. It was found that NGOs maintain a good relationship with the GO mainly with the district administration. GO-NGO meeting is held in every month. Go-NGO relation ship seemed good in Gaibandha. NGOs want cooperation from GO and they welcome GO people to visit their programme. Some NGOs have their own engine boat to supervise their programme and they invite GO people to use the boat to go to the char. As char programme is expensive, so this sort of recourses can be used jointly to ensure optimum use and GO people can visit our education programmes and give us...
feedback and similarly we can also visit their schools and give them feedback. In this way we can work together. Our field staff live in the working char and as most of the GO officials stay in the main land so our field staff can also be a strength in the chars to deliver good education services to the char people. - stated the NGO group at the GO-NGO meeting at Gaibandha.

Local level planning involving GO-NGO & community and resource allocation at the local level (UP) can make an effective and congenial environment to work together- mentioned the GO group at the said meeting. Strengthening the local government and involving them effectively in all the development interventions might help to implement programmes effectively. Though GO and NGO meets every month but they very rarely share their outcomes and activities between themselves. The char dwellers have not mentioned anything significant because they are little aware of NGOs role (Char Kalasona, Kabilpur).

Community involvement

Though not being aware of their roles and responsibility some SMCs in the chars found to be very active specially in regard to solving the problem of irregular teacher or shortage of teacher. They even with the community people bought some furniture for the school and donated their land. But in regard to school related activities the SMCs and the community people expressed that “we discussed the development issues several time with the AUEOs but no action has been taken yet”. The school authority does not always hear their voice. They felt the need to aware all the community and SMC people including the AUEO and HT about what they can do together for the School. Though they seem to be very concern but they can do very little, as most of the char people are very poor. The community people of Kunderpara revealed during the FGD that “We do not have food for the whole year so what can we contribute? Half of us do not have our own land”. It was found that the Union Parishad chairman as a representative of the local government body does not have any role to play. They are not even a member of the education committee at the upazilla level in the Government and DFID supported primary education programme ESTEEM. They have formed an upazilla-planning group. Even in this group there is no provision for the upazilla parishad chairman to be the member. May be the reason behind this is that this group will work in the upazilla level.

Conclusion

Most of the Char people are very conscious about their education and wants to avail this opportunity if everything is supportive. Unfortunately, it is interesting to find that though the char people had totally different situation and need compared to the mainland people, they were not being addressed differently by GO or NGO people while chalking out different education programme.

Knowing the overall situation of the Char it is very much true that they have to fulfill their basic needs first as was expressed by some female discussants in the FGD. But they are all-aware of the importance of education and want to fulfill it side by side with other basic needs.
Notes

1. Programme Concept and Management Arrangements, May 2002
2. BBS/Planning Commission, Fifth Five Year plan 1997-2002 (1998), GoB
4. Programme Concept and Management Arrangements, May 2002, Char Livelihoods Programme, DFID
7. Health Scoping Study, Char Livelihood Programme design, DFID March 2002

Bibliography

BBS/Planning Commission, Fifth Five Year plan 1997-2002, GoB
Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics Census 2001
Health Scoping Study, Char Livelihood Programme Design, DFID March 2002
Living with Uncertainty, Responses to risk and vulnerability on the Riverine Chars: A Rapid Assessment of Gaibandha District-2002
Literacy Training and It’s Impact In Bangladesh, Dr. Mahbub Ahmed, World Bank
Options for Transport interventions, Draft output of the Transport Analysis and Design Mission March 2002
Non Formal Education in Bangladesh, December 2000, Directorate of Non Formal Education
Primary Education Statistics in Bangladesh-2001, Department of Primary Education. Programme Concept and Management Arrangements, May 2002
Project Concept Note: Chars Livelihood Programme- Bangladesh(2002-2009)
Terms of reference –Char Livelihoods Programme- Design Phase, Education Scoping Study 2002