

BRINGING CHAR PEOPLE IN LIGHT

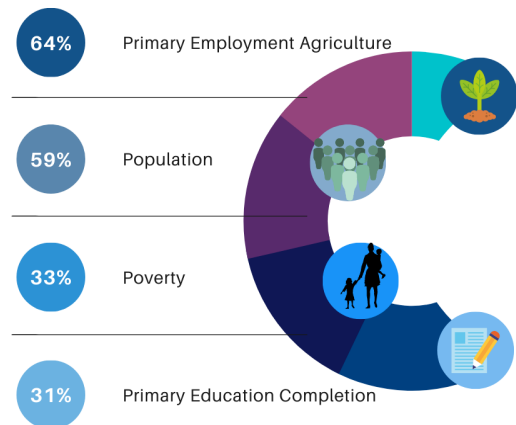
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ABOUT ALOKITO CHAR

“Alokito Char” is a project implemented by National Char Alliance (NCA) secretariat Shamunney. The project is funded by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC. The project speaks for the people living in char islands and do advocacy works at national level in order to bring meaningful improvements in their life. This newsletter tries to make readers understand why the char people need special attention of government by highlighting some key statistics which reflect the realities of char islands. In addition, the specific proposals developed by NCA and Shamunney jointly to be incorporated in the election manifestoes of all political parties are presented in this newsletter. It is important to note here that, char lands are spread over more than 100 upazilas of 32 districts of Bangladesh and due to geographical position of the country is mostly affected due to the impact of climate change. And, people living in char areas specifically in coastal chars, are continuously fighting against various natural disasters such as extreme river erosion, and drought. So, coastal chars have been prioritized while highlighting the vulnerability statistics of char upazilas. Apart from these, this newsletter also presents the activities and successes of the project so far. Remarks given by honorable parliamentarians, development partners and members of NCA are also stated at the end of the newsletter.

WHY NATIONAL BODY MUST HAVE SPACE FOR THE CHAR LIVING PEOPLE?

Bangladesh’s amazing journey of progress has been inclusive as reflected in numerous macro and social indicators. And the country is committed to attain the SDGs, leaving no one behind. It has achieved the highest ever 8.13 per cent gross domestic product (GDP) growth rate during the FY19. The country’s per capita income is now over USD 1,900 compared to USD 700 in 2009; poverty and extreme poverty have been halved during this period etc. Achievements in terms of social indicators are even more impressive with continued fall in infant and maternal mortality rates along with highest life expectancy (nearly 73 years) in Bangladesh. According to Household Income Expenditure Survey 2016, national poverty rate is 24.3. However, in some char



Let's look at the numbers

- ⇒ 64.1 % or more of the selected Char people relies on agriculture. A 1% increase in agro-GDP reduces poverty by 0.39%.
- ⇒ Char households require very little to come out of extreme poverty. Each household requires only \$500.
- ⇒ 59% Or more of inhabitants of selected char upazilla are aged between 15 to 64. The benefit of this workforce is still not explored by non-farm sectors.
- ⇒ Average poverty rate in selected char upazilla is 32.4 while national average is 24.3.
- ⇒ On an average 30.6% of selected char upazilla people completed primary education and age ranges from 18 years and above.

upazila the rate is higher than national average. Although Bangladesh has made overall progress towards the first goal of sustainable development: No Poverty; still more focus is needed on char people. It has several poverty pockets and environmental hotspots which require special policy attention. The Char areas occupy around 10 percent of the country's overall land areas where almost 10 million people live. Without advancing the right of char people living in poverty the country will not be able to reap the benefit of sustainable development. In order to attain SDGs advancing the right of char people living in poverty to adequate and sustainable livelihoods is very important. Moreover, the primary education completion rate is only 30.6% in selected char upazila which reflect the need of education programs in concerned char area.

In addition to these, the national body must have space for the people of char where they can present their views and problems. And, the political parties must specify the proposals to bring positive changes in the socio-economic conditions of the Char people in the election manifestos. **Establishment of char foundation, specifying development projects for Char and formulation of National Char Policy** needs to be incorporated in the election manifestos of all political parties.

NEED FOR ESTABLISHMENT OF CHAR FOUNDATION OR BOARD

A designated national level Char Foundation/ Board has to be established in order to ensure the sustainable development of people of Char. Currently government has a Haor Board but there is no Char Board. Government proposed special assistance for the development of Char, Haor and undeveloped area but absence of institutional authority made it unclear that where the fund has spent, who spent this fund and when this fund spent. In the fiscal year 2019-20, the government allocated BDT 227 crore specifically for char development and settlement which was 27.27 crore in previous fiscal year¹. The above mentioned project is being implemented under land reclamation project of Bangladesh Water Development Board². For proper implementation of the fund, need a foundation/board for char people so that char people can complain about any matter. The Board will work as the institutional authority for the development and disaster management in Char areas. As no institutional authority is there, the National Budget Allocations for Char areas remain unspent. Hence, the formation of a foundation will allocate and ensure proper disbursement of the adequate budget for the people living in the Char areas. The Board can further ensure coordination to enhance efficiency and avoid overlapping. It is noteworthy to mention here that "Department of Bangladesh Haor and Wetland Development" (DBHWD) was formed on 24th July 2016 and a 20-year Haor Development Master Plan and Database has been prepared for development of Haor areas. To develop infrastructure and fostering socio-

economic development of the people of the char areas, a specific board/foundation like haor area is a must.

Specifying development projects for Char

Specific development projects are needed in order to attain Sustainable Development Goal targets. There have been no specific projects undertaken to ensure poverty alleviation and sustainable development of Char areas. Specific development projects such as health and education services, meeting demands for food and nutrition, creating job opportunities, developing human skills, increasing agro-production, managing disasters need to be undertaken for the sustainable development of the people in Char areas.

Formulation of National Char Policy

Absence of "National Char Policy" made the comprehensive approach for the development of Char people taken by the Government ineffective. In order to create a vivid and holistic view the National Char Policy must include eradication of poverty, social safety net, disaster management, education, services, women and child rights, preservation, land use, agricultural development, crop marketing, social awareness initiatives etc. The National Policy Char must be comprehensive so that it may be applicable in long-term view.

Activities and Progress of NCA

- ◆ Advocacy for formation of Char Development Board/Foundation;
- ◆ Comprehensive research to determine current socio-economic and geographic conditions of the char areas;
- ◆ Advocacy initiatives to encourage private sector participation in Char development;
- ◆ Enhance accountability of the service providers towards the char people.

¹ https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/672e3d4d_09bb_4205_9afd_843de55481d1/Final%20Safety%20net_English.pdf

² https://www.bwdb.gov.bd/index.php/site/ongoing_project#page-1



NCA PROPOSAL

Under national char alliance platform, those who work in the Char, as well as member of PKSF can work directly for bringing meaning improvement in the life of char people. And those who are not member of PKSF will have to sign a contract as an associate organization for flexible functioning towards char development. The alliance proposed an interim solution to the problem of mobilizing the char fund by suggesting PKSF to disburse the char fund to one or two person of each char. The Honorable Planning Minister Muhammad Abdul Mannan and PKSF both has agreed on the proposed solution. As, the follow-up and monitoring mechanism of PKSF is excellent so it was thought of as the disburser of the char fund. However, still the proposal is in discussion phase.

WAY FORWARDS

People living in char area are the most affected people due to climate change. The char people lack the security of their lives and livelihood and char people are being deprived of their rights. The national level advocacy of the NCA has drawn the focus of government on char people. And, government has been continuously allocating funds for char people for several years. However, it is difficult to disburse the money allocated in the national budget as no authority or department has been specified to spend the fund for the development of char. This fact necessitates the need of a char foundation to ensure proper implementation and spending of the fund provided by the government. Regarding the commitment to attain Sustainable development, it is important to note that without the development of the char people the development of will not sustain. Acknowledging the fact, Mr. M.A Matin, Member of Parliament, Bangladesh National Parliament has suggested to spread access to electricity all over the country, to build cottage industries for the char people, to allow fisheries, to build clinics and schools in char areas and to allow toll-free communication and transportation facilities for the char people. While doing the advocacy works to encourage private sector participation in char development it has been found that the private organizations and small entrepreneurs are less interested to execute programs and to establish industries in char areas. As per Ambassador, Switzerland to Bangladesh, Mr. H.E. Ambassador Rene Holenstein Bangladesh need pilot programs along with policies and strategic plans at national levels to improve the implementation capacity of the country. He also identified the

need of fund allocation according to designated institution/department/authority. Players including government, NGOs, stakeholders, development organizations, small and medium entrepreneurs, donor agencies, local tycoon etc. must undertake necessary measures to eradicate the existing constraints particularly geographical and natural to generate employment in char areas, to reduce the risk and vulnerability, to ensure food-security and social-safety, to emphasize on education and communication, to have open market for char farmers, to free people from poverty and hunger and to lift the living standards of the people in char areas.

The statistics presented in this newsletter, covers the entire upazilla rather than char area alone. There is an estimation of aggregate population living in char areas, however the statistics encompassing particular char area is not available. So, statistics for specific char areas is required to enhance the capacity of the research analysis.



National Char Alliance is a national platform aimed for creating better life for char people through national level advocacy and research

works. This platform consist of likeminded development partners, international and national development organizations, civil society representatives, researchers, journalists, entrepreneurs, representatives from women and farmer organizations. For the last one decade, the alliance has been performing advocacy works for the rights of the char people.



Shamunnay is the secretariat for the National Char Alliance. It is a non-profit non-government think tank focused on pro-people research and advocacy. For

more than a decade, it has been conducting such activities to ensure fair share of development for the people living at the bottom of the social pyramid.



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“Alokito Char” is a project of Shamunnay

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