

**‘Livelihood Challenges in Haor Region: A
case Study of Maulvibazar District’**

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Introduction

The status of biodiversity and the integration of flora and fauna have made haor as one of the most beautiful places of Bangladesh. As the haor region is a marginalized area of the country, women and farmers, face massive challenges in the daily struggle of survival. In haor region, the highest number of population lives in Sylhet (3.36 million) and the lowest in Maulvibazar (2.10 million).

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Table . 1. District-wise Geographical Distribution of haors in Bangladesh

Haor District	No. of Haor	% of Total no. of Haor	Name of major Haors
Sunamganj	95	22.9	Dekhar, Kalikota, Naluar, Pagner, Shanir, Tanguar
Sylhet	105	25.4	Boro Haor, Patharchuli, Dhamrir, Banaiya
Habiganj	14	3.4	Gungiajuri, Ikram-Sangar, Makalkandi
Maulavibazar	3	0.7	Hail, Hakaluki, Kawadighi
Netrakona	52	12.6	DingiPota, Medar Beel, Talar
Kishoreganj	97	23.4	Khunkumi, Mithamain, BoroHaor
Brahmanbaria	7	1.7	Dattakhola, Tikkar Par
	414	100.0	

- 1.To explore the major challenges of the haor-dependent local communities including women, fisher folks, farmers, producers;
- 2.To enquire into the impacts of natural and man-made disasters;
3. To put forward recommendations for different actors including Government Agencies, Local Government Institutions, Communities, NGO/Civil Society etc.

To explore this study FGD'S (Focused Group Discussion) and KII's (Key Informant Interview) had been conducted.

Livelihoods in Haor

Although a little more than half of the population (53.67%) depends on agriculture, the corresponding figures for Sylhet and Netrokona district are not similar. Only 35 percent of haor dwellers depend of agriculture, while the rate is 71 percent in Netrokona.

However, instead of limiting themselves in agriculture, the haor inhabitants depend on a variety of occupations for their livelihood. A great portion (12.52%) of haor people makes their living by business. Others are employed at non-farm labor (6.13%), service (5.65%), fishery (2.59%), and transport (2.39%). A noteworthy percentage (3.41%) of the population depends on remittances sent by family members working abroad.

Natural Disasters in Haor

Table : Flash flood damage in haor districts

	Crop loss		Fish loss		Damaged fodder		Total loss	% of TOTAL
	Amount	% of total	Amount	% of total	Amount	% of total		
Sylhet	45057.759	10.26	36.55	1.88	1159.95375	10.26	46254.26	10.22
Sunamganj	196534.632	44.75	107	5.5	5,060	44.76	201701.63	44.59
Habiganj	66,173	15.07	1,720	88.57	1,704	15.08	69597	15.38
Netrokona	46,311	10.56	0	0	1,192	10.54	47503	10.5
Maulavibazar	24629.757	5.6	53.75	2.78	634.06125	5.6	25317.57	5.6
Kishoreganj	60013.647	13.67	24.6175	1.27	1544.97375	13.67	61583.24	13.61
Brahmanbaria	406.41	0.09	0	0	10.4625	0.09	416.87	0.09
Total	439126		1,942		11,305		452373	

Impacts of natural disasters

Loss of Crops

An average 50 percent cropped area in haor entirely lost its crops which was mainly Boro rice. However, community reports the damage to be much higher (close to 90%) in many areas. For example, Kishoreganj lost 90 percent of its rice crops according to the community; which however was 31.8 on average according to the official statement.

Loss of Fishery

An immediate impact on fishery was ponds being washed away. Fish loss was reported in Sunamganj, Kishoreganj, Netrokona, Moulvibazar and Sylhet. In Koshoreganj, it was mostly culture fishery. An estimated 903 MT of fishloss was reported. According to the fisheries office of Sunamganj, fishes of 20 haors from 11 Upazilas suffered from murrain. Among the Upazilas are Sadar, South Sunamganj, Jagannathpur, Dharmapasha, Dirai, Tahirpur, Jamalganj etc. Among the Haors are Dekhar, Dharam, Dhankuniya, Cheptir Haor, Chayar Haor etc.

Impacts of natural disasters

Loss of Livestock

Haor flood not only damaged human food, it also drowned animal food. It further means a loss of fodder (straw) which in total is estimated to be 452,189 MT for all 7 affected districts. This made the natural biodiversity of the region vulnerable to an extreme food crisis.

Farmers and local cattle industry not only suffered from shortage of their own food but also fodder for their cattle. They are reportedly selling away their cattle at low rates. In addition, poor water quality and disease have killed ducks in number of areas further adding up to the damage. In the remote villages of the district, by drinking the polluted water of the haor, duck and ducklings also died.

The overriding challenge of the inhabitants of haor is perhaps the fact that they have limited livelihood options if their existing livelihoods are disrupted by natural calamities. The complexity of this challenge restricts their livelihood options—holding them back from joining the journey towards national progress. The haor inhabitants mainly rely on Boro crops and fishing, while a smaller section depends on livestock rearing and small business. Hence, enhancing resilient livelihood of haor inhabitants—a livelihood that can sustain its key functions (food, income, poverty reduction, etc.) and absorb the impacts of disasters and shocks without causing major disruption in the day-to-day functions —is their utmost need, in line with the priority of SDGs and 7th Five Year Plan (FYP) of Bangladesh.

How the problem would address?

The complexity of challenge restricts their livelihood options—holding them back from joining the journey towards national progress. The haor inhabitants mainly rely on Boro crops and fishing, while a smaller section depends on livestock rearing and small business. Hence, enhancing resilient livelihood of haor inhabitants—a livelihood that can sustain its key functions (food, income, poverty reduction, etc.) and absorb the impacts of disasters and shocks. Apart from that, underdeveloped state of communication infrastructure leads to the various challenges: insufficient amount of private sector investment and small-scale entrepreneurship in these areas. In this context, proper adaptation strategies, combine climate tolerant crops, financial incentives to farmers and public participation are essential in Maulvibazar district to communicate livelihood challenges solution.

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