

## **Adverse Livelihood pattern of Sonargaon Fisher Community: A Drawback for Scope of Fishery**

### **Mushfik Jalal**

Senior Executive – GIS  
Global Brand Pvt. Ltd.  
Email- evan.eight.8@gmail.com  
Mobile: +88 01717 657454

### **Background**

Today, in Bangladesh, when we say ‘fisherman’, the image that comes to mind is often of a helpless, debt ridden, over burdened face full of despair living from hand to mouth. Fishermen are small and marginal. They obviously cannot derive any benefits from economies of scale in their small, fragmented holdings. And as they are in the unorganized sector they are without institutional access to modern technologies and knowledge or financial services through which they can make investments to improve productivity of fish. Poor infrastructure and connectivity (power, telecom, roads) further compound their competitive disadvantage. The odds are heavily against him. Unless policy frameworks and institutionalized support systems are made available and accessible equitably to all, marginal fishers will continue to find impossible to come out of the vicious cycle of poverty, which they have been forced into.

Objective of this study is to assess economic condition and right situation of fishers’. Problems and opportunities of fisher community also will be identified through assessing economic condition and right situation.

### **Study Area**

This research has been conducted to fisher community of sonargaon upazila in Narayanganj District. The fisher’s communities at Sonargaon Upazila in Narayanganj District have become the victims of various violations of rights that affected their livelihood seriously. They can’t exercise their rights over the natural resources.

Fishermen do not live all over the Sonargaon Upazila. They live in some specific location across the riverside. Fishermen are found living in Raghunar char, Komlapur, Shobujbag, Gucchagram, Chuadanga, Tek para, Haria, Shatvaia para, Roghuvanga Mohallas of Sonargaon Upazila. Raghunar char, Komlapur, Shobujbag, Gucchagram, tek para and Chudanga are located in **Char** area. Most of the fishers live in these **Char** area. Another significant number of fishers are found in Shatvai para excepting **Char** area. Remaining little number of fishers lives in Haria and Roghuvanga Mohallas.

### **Methodology**

Fisherman is the target group of this study. Those households have been selected who feed on fishing activity. Purposive sampling technique has been used to select household. Nine different mohallas' of sonargaon upazila have been selected where fishermen live. A total of 200 households have been surveyed using probability in proportion to the size of each village fishers' population. Fisher of different religion, income group, age, and living place has been specified for study purpose.

Quantitative and qualitative method has been used. Questionnaire survey has been conducted and primary data has been collected. Focus group discussion (FGD) of stakeholders has been conducted to find out risk among fisher community. Data sources are fishermen (household head) or any senior member of that household in absence of fisherman (household head) and officials of Fishery Department, Agriculture Department, Thana Health Complex and Union Parishad.

### **Analysis and Findings**

#### **Economic Condition**

Fisher's expenditure on food is found greater portion of their total cost followed by expenditure on transport and education. Expenditure in other basic services and facilities are insignificant.

Sometimes expenditure of their household crosses the limit of income level. Their food expenditure covers most percentage of their total expenditure. Thus they have a little access to other basic need as they earn a little and expense most in food.

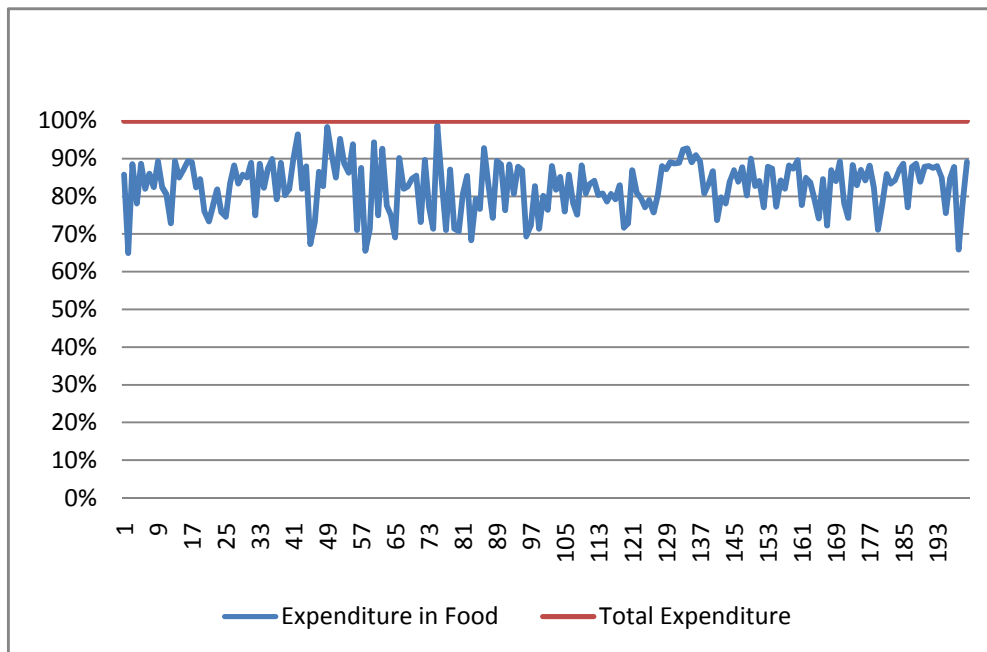


Fig 1: Expenditure of food in percentage of total expenditure

Fig 1 is showing that, fishers cost is maximum for food of their total income. They cost around 80% on food in percentage of total income. Sometimes it reaches intolerable situation when households' food expenditure exceed 90% or more in percentage of total expenditure. Such situation is indicating that, most of the households earn to only eat properly three times in a day. They expense a little on other sector such as health, cloth, education, transport etc. as they earn insufficiently. A few households are better position comparing others and costs 60% to 70% in food consumption of their total expenditure but also in unsatisfactory manner.

To earn more fishermen get involve in other occupation seasonally or very occasionally supplementing their monthly income for short period of year.

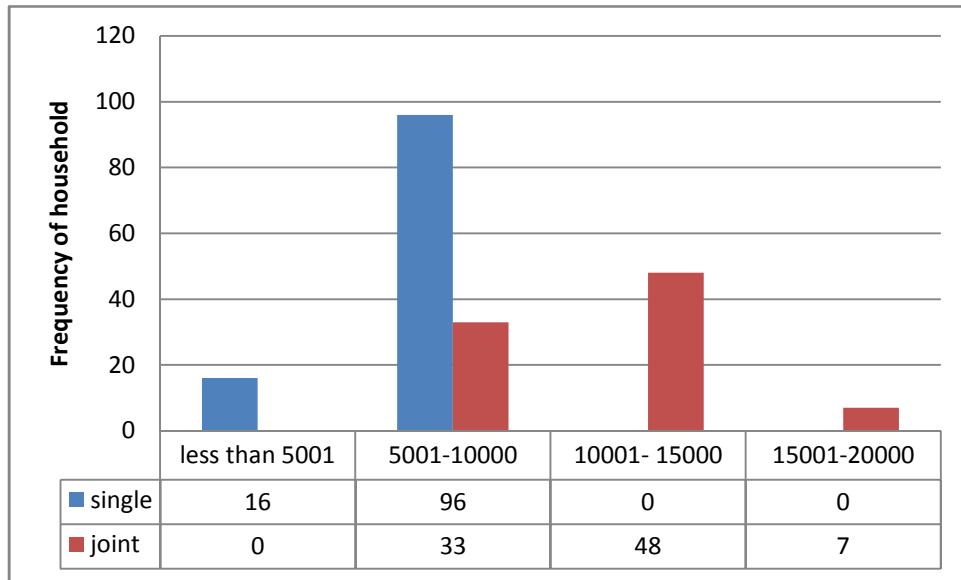


Fig 2: Monthly income range of households on family type basis

Fig 2 shows that, most of the households of fisher community earn between BDT 5001-1000/month. Both single and joint family types exist within this range. The number of single family type is higher in this case.

Fisher cannot earn enough depending on fishing to lead a sound life. They get involved in different occupations to supplement income. However, they are prohibited to catch fish by authorities; they get involved seasonal and very occasional occupation. Table 1 is showing different occupations on different time period with each of that mean income.

**Table 1: income pattern of fisher community**

Type of income source	Main income source (Year round)	Supplement income source	
	Fishing	Very occasional	Seasonal
Mean income (monthly)	BDT 7472.49	-	BDT 3235.78

**Access to Public Institutions**

Fishers seem to go in different local public authorities such as Fishery department, Agriculture Department, Govt. health facility, Union Parishad and police authority.

**Table 2: Access to public authority**

Authority	Percentage of households receive service
Fishery department	51.5%
Agri. Department	4%
Thana health complex	100%
Union parishad	43%
Police	26%

Table 2 shows that, that, annually 51.5% of total households go to fishery department. Only 4% of total households receive service from agriculture department. Each household go to health complex for treatment as it offers cheaper treatment and no other private clinic exist within this locality.

They receive services of different public authorities. The question is “are they satisfied with authorities services”? Figure 3 describes their satisfaction level.

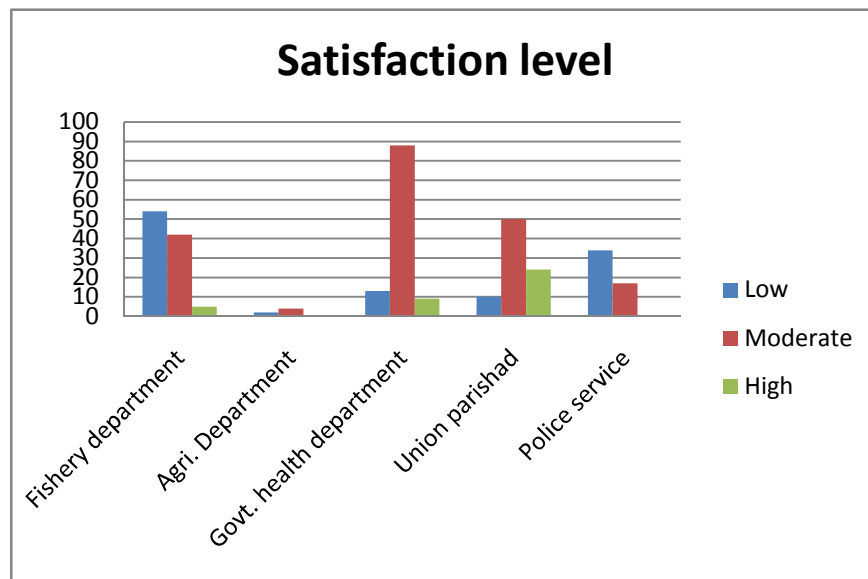


Fig 3: Satisfaction level of fishers' family on local public authority

Figure 3 shows fishery department's performance is low according to most of the fishers'. In case of agri. department the situation is poor. A significant number of households receive service from Govt. health organization. Most of the fisher's family says moderate level of service about Govt. health facility. In case of union parishad, service delivery is moderate according to most fisher's opinion. Police service is commented by low level of service delivery in most cases.

### Financial Debt

According to survey result, 72% of total fisher's households receive loan from different organization. In this case NGOs are prominent. 68% of total loan receiving households receive loan from NGOs. But fisher's household's faces adverse situation associated with borrowing money from NGOs. Following figure is describing emerging problems due to receiving loan from different sources.

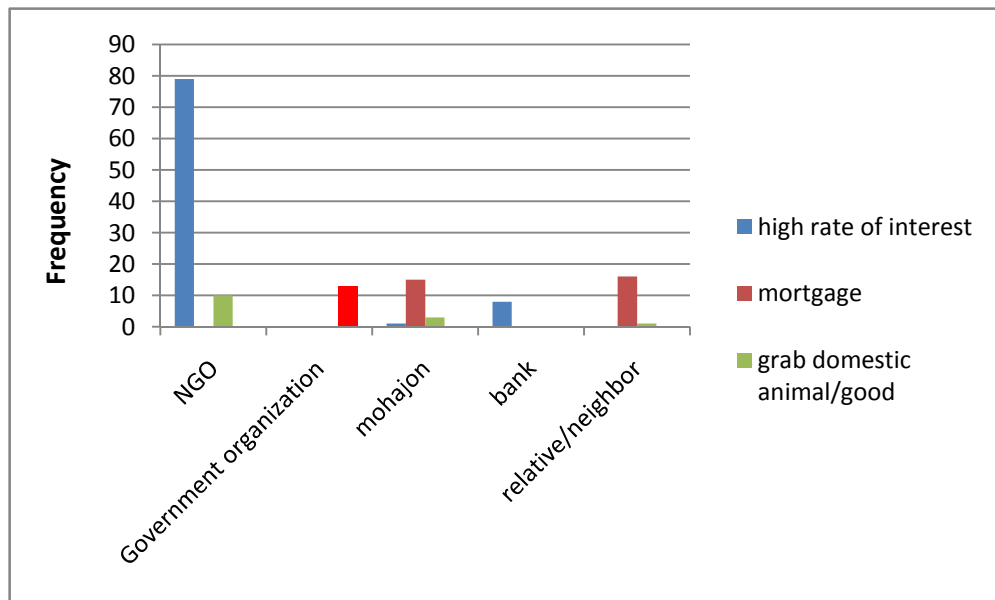


Fig 4: Incidence during repayment of loan by fishers

Fig 4 is indicating difficulties seem most in case of NGO. Most of the farmers' response is that NGO offers higher rate of interest. They cannot afford to repay loan and as a result they grab domestic animal/good. Govt. organizations performance is better here during repayment. But a few fishers receive loan from Govt. organization as fishers are not aware of this loan service. Besides fishers are interested to receive small scale loan along with frequent manner which Govt. organization does not allow. On the other hand NGO allows frequent small scale loan along with simple procedure and here lies the reason behind taking loan from NGO by most fishers.

Repayment of loan to mohanjon, bank and relative/neighbor is not beyond difficulties.

**Risk**

Fisher community is not out of certain risk. Suddenly their livelihood can be hampered through occurrence of different calamities. A focus group discussion (FGD) has been conducted between officials of local Fishery Department, Agriculture Department, Thana Health Complex and Union Parishad to find out risks fishermen and their family experience during their lifetime. Table 3 presents risks faced by fishers.

**Table 3: Risks faced by fishers of Sonargaon Upazila**

	Household	Mohalla	Community
Natural		Rainfall	River erosion Flood Strong wind
Health and life cycle	Injury Disability Old age: senility, incapacity and unexpected death	Epidemic	
Social	Crime Domestic violence	Criminal gangs	Social upheaval
Economic	Eligible price of fish failure	Market jurisdiction	Fishing paused by Govt.
Political	Patron-client relationship	Disallow fishing	
Environmental	Unhygienic sanitation	Waste pollution	Dragging

Table 3 is showing different types of risks such as natural, health, social etc. how become causes of anxiousness among fisher’s Households, Mohalla and community. It is responsibility of different Government institutions to look after the possibility and opportunity and to ensure a better working environment for fisher community through reduction of mentioned risk.

**Unawareness or Deprivation?**

It is common that marginal people are not concerned about their rights. The scenario is not different in case of Sonargaon fisher’s community. The issue is that, really they are not concerned or it is result of deprivation?

Following multiple response analysis helps to find out the issue.

**Table 4: Multiple responses on matters related with fishers' right**

Questions	Responses (No)		Percentage of cases
	Frequency	Percent	
1. Is there anyone in your family holding VGD/VGF card?	200	25.4%	100%
2. Do you know about RTI facts?	200	25.4%	100%
3. Are you facilitated with rehabilitation during "Jatka Nidhon Bondho Korun" program	200	25.4%	100%
4. Is anyone of your family a member of CBO?	188	23.9%	94%
Total	788	100%	394.0%

Table 4 is indicating that, 100% households of fisher community do not have VGD/VGF card as well as they are not facilitated with rehabilitation during “Jatka Nidhon Bondho Korun” program. There is not a single person having knowledge about RTI facts. Fisher community may be criticized by Govt. authority saying that they are not aware of their rights. But actually it is Govt. Authority’s duty to provide VGD/VGF card, rehabilitation, necessary information about RTI facts among fishers’ community. Authority does not obey their duty to the mentioned inputs and resulting deprivation of fishers’.

And, when the question arises on fishers’ awareness, it can be said small portion of fisher community are aware of their rights. Table 5 shows there is 94% of total household reply “NO” on the question “Is anyone of your family a member of CBO?” Remaining 6% of total households are found where at least one member of that family is a member of CBO. Only one CBO is found in Sonargaon fishers’ community named “Bondhumohal”. The objective of “Bondhumohal” is to establish equity for catching and marketing fish.

**Concluding Remark**

Bangladesh is criss-crossed by many rivers. This country comprises of unlimited resource of fishing. Fisher community has a great opportunity to proper using such



resource. But scenario is different among fisher community of Sonargaon Upazila. They have been living an inauspicious life. A few fishers seem prosperous within the community. Here arises the matter of inequality to the contrast of access to services, facilities, information. Excepting food still marginal fishers are not facilitated with accommodation by Government. Most of the fishers (46% of total households) live at others land (given by local elite group) on prerequisite basis of sharing a proportion of caught fish with them who facilitate fishers' accommodation. Local administrations also do not look after at them. Recent dragging activity on river makes fishers' prohibited in proceeding fishing activity within dragging perimeter. Dragging activity is also degrading the production of fish from river. Communication and transport system is not available all day long. Fisher living in Roghunar Char, Komlapur, Shobujbag, Tekpara and Chuadanga have to cross river everyday for their livelihood. Boat is only transport mode for them which is not available all time. Besides boat transport includes higher transport cost which is difficult for fishers to maintain considering total income.

In fine, fishers of Sonargaon Upazila is optimized by resource as Meghna River is crossed across their community and this river is a great source of "Hilsha" fish. They can meet the demand of fish specially "Hilsha" all over the country as well as it can be a great source of foreign currency by exporting fish to abroad. But nothing can be possible without establishing fishers' right. Local administration and Fishery Department of Bangladesh Govt. should look after cordially to on their rights for social uplift of marginal fishers' in Sonargaon Upazila.

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