

# The New Nation

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## Climate change impact-2: Livelihood of fishers under pressure



Poverty-stricken and desperate fishermen's wives and under-age children also take part in their trade. Photo shows women and children are sorting fish according to their species and grade. NN photo

Rafiqul Islam Azad

Subol Hori, a sexagenarian fisherman of village Koirbottyapara at Borghop, Kutubdia, an island in Cox's Bazar, the southeastern coastal area of the country, can no more maintain his 20-member family. He is exhausted.

All of his four sons, who could not cross the boundary of secondary school, are also fishermen. They use to go for fishing in the deep sea but cannot earn money as much as their family needs.

"We are compelled to lead a miserable life. With limited earnings of my sons, we are surviving somehow. We try to ensure meals and clothes for family members first but we cannot bear our medical and educational expenses," the by-born fisherman, who maintains the joint family consisting of his wife, sons, sister-in-laws, grandsons and granddaughters lamented.

Subol Hori, a symbol of distressed fishermen, said the fishermen are to catch fish during the seven-month fishing season from September to March but during the rest of the time they do not have any work and are to depend on the earnings of earlier months.

"Fishermen cannot change their professions as they are not so educated and do not have experience of other jobs," he observed.

Setubandhu Das, 55, Abdur Rahim, 19 and Subhadra, 28, wife of fisherman Bhagirath of the same area echoed the opinion of Subol Hori.

They said fishes are not available in the sea in abundance as before. Besides, fishermen have to go far away to catch fish as the fishing grounds have also been changed.

Setubandhu Das, a former joint secretary of Dubla Fishermen Group said fishermen have nets and boats but they do not have land. They should be given government loan keeping their nets and boats as mortgage.

A fish businessman has to pay Tk 30,000 as interest to Aratdar (wholesaler) if he receives Tk 100,000 as loan for business purpose, he said.

He emphasised the need for determining the maritime boundary so that fishermen can catch fish within the territory of the country and avoid unexpected harassment from neighbouring countries.

Jafar Ahmed, 50, a fish businessman, called as company or bahaddar of Borghop area in Kutubdia had to incur loss of Tk 100,000 in this season. The loss compelled him to anchor six of his fishing trawlers in a small canal.

"Fish production is decreasing day by day. No fish is available near the shore. Fishermen have to go to deep sea to catch fish," he said.

The fishermen-leader blamed allowing huge number fishing trolleys for decrease of fish in the deep sea.

Asked whether there is any relation of climate change with reduction of fish production he expressed his ignorance about it.

He, however, observed that the rising of sea water, frequent attack of cyclone and erosion in the costal areas are posing threat to the lives and livelihood of the fishermen.

Jafar Ahmed, who is also President of Kutubdia Fishing Boat Owners' Association, said many fishermen are changing their profession as they cannot maintain their family.

The fishermen are to choose cultivation of salt, running grosser shop, earth filling, driving of non-motorised vehicles and migrating to different cities, including Dhaka for

alternative jobs.

Mohammad Hossain Badsha, 50, also a bahaddar said that he faced a huge loss this time.

"Fish production is reducing reduced year after year. Besides, giving frequent signals in the sea asking fishermen to come to the shore are also hampering the catch," he observed.

Md Monirul Islam, a teacher of the Department of Fisheries under Dhaka University said production from floodplains, the largest contributor to inland capture fishery is likely to decline because of hindrance to spawning migrations due to FCD structures.

He observed that hilsa production in inland sector is declining and likely to decline further.

On impact of climate change on fishing community, Dr Ainun Nishat, a leading environmentalist, said it is being felt in the coastal area like cyclones in terms of intensity and ferocity.

Referring to the recurrence of major cyclones like Sidr and Nargis within months causing huge losses to lives and properties, he said intensity and frequency of storm surge may increase due to climate change.

About fishing community, Dr Nishat said previously cautionary weather signal No-3 for fishermen to come to shore were given 10 to 12 times a year. But now it has increased from 30 to 40 times a year posing a threat to the fishermen's livelihood directly.

He said fishermen take three to four days to come back home if a cautionary weather signal is given and the same time is needed to reach the deep sea.

"What will happen if a fresh signal is given? They will not be able to go for deep sea. In this way, if three such signals are given one after another, what will be the fate of the fishermen?," he questioned and said, "the first impact of climate change will be on their (fishermen) livelihood."

Dr Nishat, also a water expert, observed that changing pattern of oceanic current, erosion pattern and fishing ground, increasing sea water and salt at costal belt are also posing threat to the livelihood of the fishermen.

When communicated Duty Forecasting Officer of Meteorology Directorate in Dhaka Farah Diba said they have to account as how many cautionary signal No-3 were given last year.

She, however, said that the Met Office issue signal No-3 if cloud is found in the Bay of Bengal.

Hamidur Rahman Azad, a Member of Parliament (MP) elected from Kutubdia-

Moheskhali constituency on Jamaat-e-Islami ticket, said fish resources and livelihood of fishermen is being affected due to sea level rise that may bring tremendous impact on national economy.

"The fishermen are rendered unemployed as fish production is reducing day by day. The government should take necessary measures to protect fish resources from disappearance and identify affected people due to climate change," he said.

Livelihood of fish workers involved in selling, repairing nets fish processing and other supporting jobs are also being affected as their works depends on production of fish.

Md Firoz, 20, an ice-worker at Cox's Bazar fishery ghat said his income is decreasing as he does not have sufficient work of loading and unloading ice from cars and fishing boats.

Minu Ara, 40, a mother of five sons and four daughters, works at a dry fish processing company at Kutubdia Borghop, said she gets small fries after shorting dry fish.

"I get Tk 50 to Tk 100 a day by trading small fries. We have to stay hungry when we do not have works," she said.

On providing education to her children, the old-age woman said, "Petet bhat din no pari, schoolot pathaio kangori (How can I send them to school while I cannot ensure our meals)."

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