



## Campaign to Prevention of Saline Water in Agriculture Land

### Problem Definition

Bangladesh is one of countries in the world most affected by climate change. In the last two decades, a growing number of floods, droughts and cyclones caused extensive economic damages to the poor and marginalized people of Bangladesh. Besides, the shrimp industry has changed for the worst the life of the majority of its countryside inhabitants who rely on agricultural for a daily living. Rich national and foreign investors have initiated shrimp farming in agricultural lands, considered as very favorable to this kind of cultivation. Shrimp farming though, has caused water salinity and as a consequence, deterioration of aboriginal agricultural productions, growing desertification of affected areas, and human migrations toward more fruitful agricultural sites or toward cities in search of jobs reallocation.

The major problems caused by the use of saline water for shrimp farming in agricultural areas are:

1. Destruction of local farming production.
2. Decrease of local livestock. Along with agriculture, countryside people in Bangladesh earn their living from livestock like chickens, ducks, cows and goats. Due to water salinity, the land's ability to produce the food needed for these animals is decreasing. Therefore farm animals are diminishing and local farmers' earning is further shrinking.
3. Increase of living cost. Local peasants generally use straws to make roof for their houses. Straws used to be very common in coastal areas but now, due to land salinity, are not as numerous as it used to be in the recent past. For this reason, people need to buy iron sheets for their house roof. Consequently, their living expenditures are also raising.
4. Reduction of drinking water from ponds. From ancient time our people use pond water for drinking. The shrimp business has caused serious damages to drinking water ponds and people have to walk 4/5 km to fetch drinking water.
5. Higher risk of embankment breaks during floods. When the hurricane AILA affected the coastal area, the embankments easily broke down. In the report written by the Bangladesh Water Development Board it is

**We dream a  
just,  
environment  
friendly ,  
sustain  
society  
where  
both male  
and female  
lead dignified  
life  
in the  
southwest  
coastal  
region  
of  
Bangladesh.**

clearly stated that the illegal pipes used for shrimps' farming were responsible for easy breaking of embankments during AILA.

6. High rate of unemployment as local peasant lose their job due to scarcity of agriculture land. Shrimps farming indeed, needs much less labor force than agriculture. For this reason, many decide to migrate to richer areas while others become dependant on Sundarbans' forest resources. The Sundarbans' resources though are limited and their regenerative capacities are slow. The Sundarbans forest, is thus threatened by over exploitation. The Royal Bengal tigers are also in danger as they come closer and closer to human settings in search of food. As consequence the man-tiger conflict is increasing day by day. Hungry tigers' attacks to human beings are frequent as never before.

## Campaign against saline water

Considering the circumstances, LEDARS and other NGOs have decided to bring forward the issue of damages due to saline water in agricultural lands. We have completed some activities in local and national level. These are as follows:

### A. Solidarity meeting with community

LEDARS along with other NGOs are organizing solidarity meeting with community members in order to raise awareness around the danger of saline waters in agricultural lands. The main objective of the meetings is to engage community people in the campaign against the use of saline water for shrimp farming.

### B. Creation of a civil society committee against saline water

LEDARS and father Luigi Paggi organized a discussion meeting in February 2, 2011 at SAMS Office. Issues related to the usage of saline water in agricultural lands were discussed and recommendations to alleviate the damages related to its use were put forward. As a result of that meeting a civil society committee called "Saline water prevention movement" was formed with the aim of sensitizing policy makers and the civil society at large. The committee consists of 9 members. Mohon Kumar Mondal, Executive Director of LEDARS, and Sahen Islam, researcher from BARCIK, were selected respectively as Convener and Secretary. According to the initial plan, the committee leads the movement.

### C. Training of development workers

Mohon Kumar Mondal facilitated trainings to development workers on problems of saline water and tools to raise awareness among community members (this includes acquisition of skills on advocacy techniques and campaigns' organization). LEDARS organized two training sessions in February 22 and 23, 2011 at Joar and Nakshi Kantha offices. A total of 12 NGOs' representatives attended the trainings.



People in Human Chain

#### D. Human Chain and Memorandum Submission

The 'Saline Water Prevention Movement Committee' organized a human chain in Shyamnagar bus stand in Satkhira district on March 1, 2011. That same day the committee submitted to the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh a memorandum to ban saline water shrimp farming in agriculture lands in coastal areas of Bangladesh.

The organizers stressed the fact that saline water shrimp farming affects the fresh water ecology, agriculture practice and livelihoods of marginalized people in rural areas. It also has, among other things, a negative impact on the Sundarbans' biodiversity and on pure drinking water ponds. Poor people of this area are thus forced to migrate in other area in order to earn their daily living. The saline water shrimp farming, in fact, only brings benefits to few people leaving behind a large number of landless farmers.

The memorandum, submitted to the Honorable Prime Minister of Bangladesh, contains 13 points. The main ones are:

- To stop the saline water shrimp companies and to open the government reservoir for irrigation.
- To reject the decisions regarding shrimp farming taken in a meeting in Khulna Divisional Commissioner's Office in January 2011.
- To enhance collaboration with peasants in order to protect local environments and bring back people to their traditional farming occupation.
- To advocate for a governmental development plan for the area.
- To create a coastal embankment with appropriate technology to protect agricultural lands.
- To work on a proper water management plan.
- To establish rainwater reservoirs, excavate ponds and install pond sand filters to ensure availability of safe drinking water for local people.

Copies of the memorandum were also sent to: honorable Minister for Agriculture, Land and Fisheries, Fish and Livestock; Divisional Commissioner, Khulna; Deputy Commission of Satkhira and Executive Engineer of Bangladesh Water Development Board. Mohon Kumar Mondal, the meeting convener, Shehin Islam, secretary, Mrs. Sarbanu Khatun, Dr. Ali Asraf, Hahibur Rahaman, Swapon Halder and other speakers who were present at the human chain organized in March 1, 2011.

Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Shyamnagar received the Memorandum on behalf of the Government and stressed the benefits of this initiative. He underlined the importance of



Women show their solidarity



Mr. UNO delivering his speech after received the Memorandum



Children's march for demanding their rights



strengthening social awareness around the sensitive issue of shrimp farming and saline water damages on agricultural lands. He also urged local people to stand against those who use saline water in agricultural lands for shrimp farming. Finally, he ensured to send the memorandum to the Honorable Prime Minister.

### E. March to defend the rights of coastal people at national level

LEDARS, BAPA and Planeteers Movement jointly organized the “iMatter Climate March” in June 11, 2011 in Dhaka from Sahabagh to National Press Club. Hundreds of young people attended the march.



March in Dhaka demanding justice to southwest people

### F. Human chain in front of Dhaka press club

LEDARS, BAPA and Planeteers Movement jointly organized a Human Chain in front of the National Press Club after the march in June 11, 2011. Students

and farmers from the southwest region participated in the march. It was headed by Mr. Jakir Hossain, joint secretary of BAPA. Ruhin Hossain Price - political party leader, Dinu Billah - writer, Sarbanu Khatun-climate victim from southwest Bangladesh, Dr. Rezwan ul Alam - director of TIB, Mohon Kumar Mondal - Executive Director of LEDARS, Hirok Sardar -Green Voice, Mrs. Syed Rezwana Hasan -Executive Director of BELA; Dr. Mohd. Abdul Matin - General Secretary of BAPA, delivered speeches demanding justice for the shrimp-farming affected people of southwest Bangladesh. The honorable speakers highlighted the problems of the southwest part of the country with special emphasis on the issue of damages related to saline water usage. They also asked for the Government to remove saline water from agricultural lands in order to protect peoples' livelihoods and environment.



Human Chain in front of National Press club.

### Our Demands:

1. Establishment of more shelters against cyclones in coastal areas
2. Quick 'rehabilitation' of the 'climate refugees' of southwest Bangladesh
3. Construction of effective coastal embankments
4. Prompt measures to protect the Sundarbans forest,



Part of Human chain

its bio-diversity and Sundarbans dependent people

5. Access to safe drinking water for coastal people through installment of more rainwater harvesters, dug ponds and establishment of pond sand filters
  6. New policies on environmental issues, such as overall management of water (including internal rivers), agriculture, fuel, transport. Measures should also be taken to guarantee laws' implementation in the field.
  7. All necessary measures to protect southwest coastal communities as they are the frontline victims of climate change.
  8. Assessment of total earning of foreign investors from saline water shrimp business
  9. Assessment of number of people damaged by saline water shrimp farming in agricultural areas
  10. Cessation of saline water shrimp business in agricultural lands in southwest Bangladesh.
- So far, from a rough count, it appears that the livelihood of 5 million inhabitants of coastal lands is in danger.

### G. Planning meeting in Satkhira

Last July 13, 2011, a planning meeting was held at Rishilpi Development Center in Satkhira. The meeting was chaired by Mr. Ashek E Elahi, Principal of Atarjan Women College of Shyamnagar, Mr. Sahidul Islam, Director of Uttaran, Father Luigi Paggi and Ad. Krishno Pada Mondal. Upazila Vice Chairman, Paikgacha, was the special guest of the meeting. About 25 NGOs' directors and representatives attended the meeting. All participants showed strong interest on the issue under discussion and assured full cooperation for the success of the meeting and future actions. Mohon Kumar Mondal, convener of saline water prevention committee and executive Director of LEDARS, moderated the meeting. It was decided that a day long meeting will further be held in order to define the term of reference and future plan of action of the committee.



Planning meeting in Satkhira

#### Updated by

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