

Background Appendix 2
Country Report (Bangladesh)

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Political history

From 1757 the region now known as Bangladesh was part of the British Empire (Bengal) and run, to all intents and purposes by the East India Company. Prior to British occupation Dhaka had been a thriving centre but, when Calcutta was established as the seat of government for the region, Bengal was reduced to the position of a primary materials producer and Dhaka's importance waned. Jute was the region's principle crop, it was shipped to Calcutta where it was further processed and exported. Cotton was also a major product and material and profits generated were largely responsible for maintaining British growth during the industrial revolution. The British exploited the Muslim-Hindu rivalry that had existed in Bangladesh for many centuries. The Hindus had the more important jobs and were generally the large landowners. Muslims were often reduced to the status of poor or landless peasants. Among the middle-classes, the Muslims and Hindus were often fighting for British patronage.

The history of Bangladesh is somewhat complicated by two periods of independence, each having a devastating effect upon the economy. In 1945 India gained independence from Britain, in 1947 East and West Pakistan (incorporating part of the State of Bengal) were created on the partition of India and in 1971 Bangladesh (former East Pakistan) declared itself independent. Following the creation of West and East Pakistan in 1947, West Pakistan was the dominant section of the country: it was the seat of government and was the first (and often last) stop for overseas aid. The favoured ethnic group in East Pakistan was the Biharis, not the majority Bengalis who often found themselves excluded from skilled jobs. Partition, based largely along religious lines, saw a mass exodus of Hindus from East Pakistan back to the State of Bengal in India. Bengalis still maintain a powerful identification with their ethnic sister state in India. Having held some of the more important and skilled posts under the British administration, the resulting administration in East Pakistan was considerably poorer than that which had existed prior to 1947 as a direct result of the exodus. The government of the newly created Pakistan was based on the old Vice Regal system and was heavily dependent upon family, ethnic and local loyalties rather than any sense of national unity, and there was little limit to the power vested in the government. In East Pakistan, Bangla, the language of the majority, was effectively discounted when Urdu became the official language of the country.

Following a cyclone in 1970 that caused the worst floods yet seen in the country, riots and general strikes threaten peace in East Pakistan. Added to this disaster was the poverty in East Pakistan, largely a result of neglect and corruption by West Pakistan. Repeated calls for independence by East Pakistan were inconsistent with West Pakistan's aim of unity and its goal of a Muslim state did not sit easily with East Pakistan's support of a secular state. Finally in 1971 West Pakistan sent in the army East Pakistan to restore stability and quash the fledgling independence movement. The West Pakistan army killed thousands in the attempt to restore order and its actions were condemned around the world. Always keen to enter the fray, particularly where Pakistan was concerned, in December 1971 the Indian Army invaded East Pakistan and in 2 weeks had routed the Pakistan army (with considerable loss of life) and provided the opportunity for Bangladesh to declare independence.

Buoyed by their new-found independence, Bangladesh immediately embarked on a path of nation-state building. It banned the use of English, declared Bangla the

official language of the country and set about creating the democratic state it felt had Karachi had stifled prior to 1971. Mujib, one of the founders of the independence movement was pronounced Prime Minister. A new constitution was announced which was based on the tenets of Mujibism (Mujibbad) or nationalism, socialism, secularism and democracy, although before long all these principles had been discarded. The task facing Mujib was not easy, the country was in economic ruin and favouritism flourished as Mujib promoted those members of the Army that had had leading roles in the independence struggle. Much of this favouritism was resented in the Army where lower ranks were promoted above others based merely on the role they had played in "The Struggle". The government's friendly position towards India alienated more Bangladeshis, further floods exacerbated the countries problems and in 1975, amidst growing civil unrest Mujib abolished all opposition parties and Bangladesh was declared a one-party state. Later that year he was murdered by the army which prompted Pakistan to officially recognise the country, but also brought to the fore many grievances between India and Bangladesh.

Mushtaque replaced Mujib and attempted to stamp out the corruption that had brought Mujib down and restore democracy. However, despite the corruption visible under Mujib, he was still considered highly by many, and disaffected members of the liberation army staged a coup in 1975 and Chief Sayem (who had served under Mujib) became president., but fears that Bangladesh was about to re-instate ties with India led to the regimes collapse 4 days after it had been installed. After a great deal of maneuvering among the high ranks in the armed forces, General Zia emerged as deputy chief martial law administrator, and was in charge of finance, home affairs, industry and information as well as being Army Chief of Staff. Only one step from the top, in November 1976, he replaced Sayem and declared himself Chief Martial Law Administrator.

Although he had a reputation for being ruthless, many consider the rule of Zia to have been the best since independence. He made extensive moves to professionalise the armed forces, brought in a 19 point economic plan, gradually adopted a more civilian mode of governance and started a rural development programme in 1977. He gradually introduced more civilians to important government posts and was reelected by a large majority in a referendum in 1977 (although its legitimacy is questioned). He made moves to secularise the country and made efforts to create trading and political cooperation links with other countries in the region. Following Zia's legitimate winning of the 1979 elections and moves to democratise the country, he was assassinated in 1981 and Sattar came to power. However, after his attempts to remove the military from government, Ershad staged a coup, dissolved the cabinet and parliament, put himself in charge and introduced martial law. The constitution was restored in 1986, only for parliament to be dissolved again in 1987. Save for a brief interim in 1982-83, Ershad remained head of state until 1990 when he was removed from power and sentenced to 13 years in prison for embezzlement amongst a host of other charges. Elections in 1991 were contested by the Awami League (Mujib's movement) led by Mujib's daughter and the Bangladesh National Party (BNP) led by Begum Khaleda Zia (Zia's widow). Zia won the election and in 1991 presidential rule was abolished in favour of parliamentary rule. Once again, Bangladesh is caught between the two opposing factions: the Awami League arguing for a secular and the BNP arguing for a muslim state. Difficulties in governing the country also stem from the lack of experience with democratic governance. Efforts at

democratisation are slow and Zia government has been plagued with strikes due to the dire economic situation.

Current political situation

Bangladesh is a constitutional democracy, albeit rather weak; the armed forces still hold considerable power in the country. The position of women is poor, despite the number of women holding power in the country and the growing Islamic movement in the country threatens the position of women.

Economic history and development issues

The state of the Bangladeshi economy is a direct result of the political situations that have engaged the country since occupation by the British in the 1750s. Because jute was shipped from Bengal to Calcutta for processing, on partition in 1947, East Pakistan had no indigenous industry for processing jute. The rapid exodus of most of the highly trained administrators in 1945 and then again in 1947 further debilitated the country of the highly trained personnel it needed. East Pakistan was persistently denied funds (particularly for industrialisation programmes) by West Pakistan and rarely received the equivalent attention of the western wing of the country. Its annual growth rate was, as a result 50% that of West Pakistan's, despite the fact that 70% of the export earnings for the country as a whole came from East Pakistan. Many of the country's external markets were lost during the period of civil unrest, war and flooding in 1970-1971.

Persistent floods, which are proving more damaging due to a rapidly increasing population, also affect the economic situation. Foreign aid and Bangladeshi money is frequently diverted to relief rather than being channelled into infrastructural and more long term development. It is often difficult to tell whether the Bangladeshi economy has improved or not. There is evidence that in fact the economy is more stable and that growth has improved together with reduced fiscal deficits and improving trade balances. However, high population growth rates and persistent set backs in the economy due to flooding mean that overall improvements are hard to identify. GDP growth remains at least 7% below what it needs to be to reduce poverty. It is still the most densely populated country in the world with one of the highest population growth rates and one of the lowest GNP per capita levels.

Literacy rates have improved recently with about 60% of the population over 15 being able to read and write. Enrolment of girls at school has also improved, although it is considered threatened by the Islamist movement. As a result of development initiatives, nearly 99% of the population have access to safe water, although poor sewage and latrine systems mean that common, preventable diseases still threaten the health of many. Life expectancy is low at about 57 years. There are high levels of infant malnutrition, and infant mortality and an estimated 36% of the population are below the very poor poverty line and 53% below the poor poverty line (World Bank Data)

The country's export based is strong yet still rather narrow. Heavy dependence upon agriculture has meant that the country is not able to generate the level of foreign exchange earnings necessary to grow out of poverty and deal with the expanding population and its subsequent pressure. Bangladesh has a very large, unskilled often underemployed labour force that needs non-agricultural industry to absorb it. To an

extent this has been addressed by the garment industry. A further impact on the economy was the Gulf War of 1990 which saw large numbers of Bangladeshis leave the region thus reducing dramatically the level of hard currency remittances from them. The public sector is said to be grossly inefficient and weak, thus not adequately implementing the various ambitious programmes brought in by the government. The military budget is the lowest in the region, although it is still only second to education in terms of its share of the overall budget. There have been budgetary increases in health, education and family planning in recent years, and transport is also currently being targeted. Bangladesh is one of the world's largest recipients of aid but it has enormous problems administering and absorbing much of the aid available, again, due to a top-heavy and inefficient public administration system. (Websites of Library of Congress; DANIDA; University of Texas; Todaro, (1992).

Development of industry

Jute: The demand for jute dropped dramatically after the Second World War when synthetic fibers became more available. Rises in oil prices and the subsequent rise in the price of synthetics in the 1970s, however, failed to enable jute to regain lost ground. Bangladesh remains the world's biggest producer and has a distinct comparative advantage with jute. The large, cheap labour force helps keep the prices low and the climate is ideal for its production. In 1985 Bangladesh accounted for 77% of the entire world trade in raw jute and 45% of the trade in jute goods (Library of Congress). This last fact highlighting the position of Bangladesh as a primary materials producer, rather than benefiting from added value in the processing stages. One of the problems with jute is its price fluctuations, the government has often had to artificially support the price to make its production profitable.

Agricultural crops: most farmers rotate their crops to take advantage of the floods/dry season. Wheat has been grown in Bangladesh – consumption is rising (partly due to the quantity of wheat as food aid that enters the country). East Pakistan did not benefit from the green revolution that occurred in West Pakistan in the 1960s. 75% of agricultural land is dedicated to rice production that accounts for 28% of GDP.

Fish: 80% of the animal protein intake of Bangladesh derives from fish, there are estimated to be around 1 million commercial fishermen in the country and 73% of rural household engage in fishing at some point during the year. Marine fisheries account for only 25% of the total catch (the rest being made up of inland culture and capture fisheries). Bangladesh is second only to China in the World for the quantity of inland fisheries production (at 900,000 mt in 1995, FAO data). 90% of Bangladeshi fish exports are shrimp (Pokrant, nd), while fish exports have been rising steadily since 1990, they still only account for 3.3% of the total production.

There has been a long history of fishing as an economic activity in the country. In 1793 the British privatised water in Bengal (except some navigable rivers) which effectively eliminated any open access or common property regime in place. As a result of privatisation, fishermen had to request rights to fish, thus putting themselves at the whim of the landowner. In 1950 the Pakistani government decided to lease out access rights through auction, but this resulted in the wealthy (non-fishers) gaining access to the rights, and thus continued to lease them to the fishermen. In 1971 fishermen's cooperatives were given sole rights to bid for the lease, provided they bid the highest price. This was however, not a fool-proof system: often unable to bid the

highest price, they had to go into partnership with landlords that gained control of the lease in the end. For a variety of reasons (political expediency mostly) Ershad brought in the New Fisheries Management Policy (NFMP) that aimed to remove short-term leases; give more control to the fishermen and improvement general management and re-stocking programmes.

Traditionally, fishing has been a lowly occupation in Bangladesh. It was originally the domain of the Hindus from the very lowest caste, or the untouchables. Muslims who fished were often regarded as suspicious because it was thought they were recent Hindu converts. By the 1960s, following the exodus of many Hindus to India in 1945 and 1947, the occupation was nearly entirely Muslim, and it is still regarded as an activity of last resort. Despite its importance to the dietary needs of the country, the fishing industry (as such) receives comparatively little attention from the government, because it is still seen as a marginal activity. (Pokrant, nd)

Bangladeshi fisheries have suffered from a number of problems. Before population pressure became an issue, fishing was an activity that fitted into the natural cycle very well. With the sheer quantity of water in the country, there was a variety of fish and a variety of means of catching them. However, as population pressure means that more measures are taken to counteract the effect of the natural flooding process in the country, so the fisheries have suffered. Coastal polders to protect the coastline from cyclones have adversely affected the saline and brackish breeding grounds and nursery areas there. Flood control projects inland have also affected the migratory patterns of some fish. The drainage of land to be used for cultivation has further decreased the fishing possibilities, as has the silting up of rivers, industrial and agricultural pollution, inadequate restocking programmes and the influx of landless peasants into traditional fishing areas. (Sahir Sadeque, nd; Pokrant, nd)

Short-term leasing, still common in many fishing grounds, (although these are supposed to have been eliminated in the NFMP), leads to decimation of stocks as fishermen aim to maximise profit in the short time available. Pond fisheries are often owned by non-fishermen who consequently have little interest in the quality of the fishery, due to a concern about the possible rent to be earned from it.

The impact of natural disasters

Bangladesh's biggest natural problem and natural asset is flooding. 80% of the country is flood plain, it has 3 major rivers and numerous smaller rivers that drain through it. Only 7.5% of the total river catchment area is in the country itself, the rest being mainly in India. The annual floods are vital to the agricultural and fishing cycle, bringing valuable silt down from the Himalayas and flooding fish breeding grounds. Historically floods were not a problem to Bangladesh. The population was able to work around them. However, since the population has reached critical levels, more and more people are forced to live in areas more prone to flooding (whereas before they lived raised above normal flood levels). The floods are normally caused by 3 things: heavy rainfall further up stream, snow melt in the Himalayas combined with rain in the mountains and from rainfall in Bangladesh itself. With no control over water management in India, Bangladesh suffers when there is exceptional rainfall in India which often combines with other local factors to cause a problem.

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A Review of Newspapers and Grey Literature on Conflicts in Fisheries of Bangladesh

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1. Introduction

Conflict in fisheries is a very complex issue in Bangladesh and these are grounded in property rights, traditional rights and access to common property (river, canal, *Beel*, *haor* and other water bodies), control over fisheries, institutional weakness, body politics in the society, commercial, communal and vested interests of many. Conflict means a situation of non-cooperation that involves groups of people with different goals, objectives and interests. It may lead to violent clash, but a dynamics in conflicts sometimes can be a positive catalyst for change in institution, process and in the society. Conflicts of fisheries in Bangladesh takes different forms and could be listed as follows:

- Access to and use of water during the dry season (between fishing and agricultural practices);
- Conflicts between fishers and middlemen (leaseholders/village heads/chief of fishers etc.)
- Lack of clarity of duties and responsibilities between Ministry of Land and the Ministry and Department of Fisheries;
- Civil Society and NGO movement against FCDI projects leading to conflicts between people and vested interest quarters; and
- The growth of shrimp farming, where business interests are conflicting with the landless and poor farmers.

The objective of the literature search is to develop greater understanding about the nature and extent of conflicts in fisheries of Bangladesh and to address potential knowledge gaps in this sector. The review mainly covered material not readily available outside Bangladesh including newspapers, in-country NGO reports and other gray literature both in Bangla and English. The review paid particular attention to the issues of shrimp fisheries, because unplanned shrimp cultivation and external control over shrimp created lots of conflicts in this sector in the last two decades. The review highlighted the causes of conflicts, how it evolved and the existing mode of conflict resolution.

2. Types and Nature and of Conflicts

The news published in the major national dailies and weeklies and few local newspapers in the recent years have been collected for the review. A total of 248 news on conflicts in fisheries were collected and categorized into four major groups including: i) violent conflict, ii) conflicts of fisheries with FCDI and growing agricultural practices, iii) institutional weakness and iv) other conflicts including debt and loss of livelihood of fishers. The newspapers reviewed included: the *Dainik Ittefaq*, *Dainik Sangbad*, *Prothom Alo*, *Dainik Janakantha*, *Bhores Kagaz*, *Dainik Inkilab*, *Metho Barta*, The Bangladesh Observer, The Daily Star, The Independent, The New Nation etc. It is to be mentioned here that there may be more news on conflicts in many other local newspapers, which could not be collected for reviewing.

Further, the real number of conflicts happened might be higher than the incidents that were reported in the newspapers.

2.1 Violent Clash

The literature survey found 52 news items reporting violent clash in fisheries sector in Bangladesh published in different national and local newspapers from 2001 to 1990. Several cases of violent clashes have been reported in 2001 while more reports were published in 2000. Twenty-one cases of clash and conflicts have been found during 1998-19990 in inland fisheries. A great number of conflicts occurred in the shrimp fisheries of Bangladesh and the survey found that about 63% of the incidents occurred in the coastal shrimp sector and the rest 37% news focused on the conflicts occurred in inland fisheries including *haor*, *baor*, *beel*, canal and river fisheries. The dates, titles of the news and the names of newspapers have been included in the appendix.

2.1 Violent Conflicts in Inland Fisheries

The fishers very often have been denied of their traditional right of catching fish in the fishing grounds forcefully by the middlemen, leasees and some time by the non-fishers powerful villagers. They were also obstructed to getting lease of the water bodies and opposed to catch fish, sell their catch in fair price and the fishes were looted by the armed miscreants and dacoits. In most cases, they were threatened, physically assaulted and injured and in few cases, they were killed by the hooligans of vested interest quarters. The following section describes few incidents of violent clashes in the inland fisheries, where primarily the fishers became victims of the occurrences.

The *daily Janakantha* a national daily reported a number of incidents of bloody clash against the fishers in different haors and several Beels of greater Sylhet regions. The report came out on 7 January 2001. It was learnt from the news that at least 200 fishers lost their lives and another 2000 were injured in different violent clashes in the region in the last 15 years. It further mentioned that the major sources of conflicts included faulty leasing of water bodies, illegal and unplanned fishing and ill competition for ownership and control over the fishing grounds in the region.

The *Dainik Ittefaq*, a prominent national Bengali news paper published a report on the boundless miseries of the real fishers of the north eastern part of the country on 23 September 2001. The paper reported that there had been many incidents of armed violence, gun fighting and false court cases against the fishers by the influentials and non-fishers vested quarters including leasees and few dishonest government officials. There have been over 2000 water bodies of different size in the 32 Upzilas of six districts of the regions. According to the existing laws, real fishers are to be awarded the rights of catching fish in the *haors* and *beels* through lease and licensing by the relevant local government departments and ministries. Many false and fake fisher's association of the non-fishers, who are connected to the power structure and politics threatened the real fishers and restricted them to participate in the tender bid forcefully with armed cadres. The fishers thus lost their traditional rights and access to fishing grounds. They are very often, bitten and physically assaulted by the hired men

of the leasees when the fisher tried to catch fish in the water bodies. Many of them became unemployed, or dislocated from their traditional occupation, or became wage labour for the leasees for fishing.

The Prothom Alo a very popular national daily reported a story of mass demonstration against the exploitation of leasees of waterbodies and illegal toll collection of police from the fishermen in Kishoreganj, a northeastern district of Bangladesh. The report was published on 10 February 2001. The report says about 3000 men and women of the fisher community of Bajitpur Upzila obstructed the water ways of the then LGRD Minister, who was elected from that constituency, to press their demand of stopping the exploitation, terrorism of the leasees against the real fishers as well as punishing the corrupted government officials including the police.

The Independent, a leading national daily published a report entitled "Fishermen hostage in hands of terrorists' gangs" on 10 October 2001. The report came from the Luxmipur district, a south central part of the country. The report says that hundreds of fishermen of that locality became hostage in the hands of an organized gangs of terrorists, who had been collecting tolls from the fishers forcefully for the last seven years. The terrorists defying the ban imposed by the government set up illegal ghats (platforms for fishing and fish landing) at 22 places on the bank of Meghna river and had been collecting tolls of Tk. ten crore every year illegally. The terrorists besides subjecting the fishermen to physical torture, looted their cash, fish, fishing nets and gears, when the fishers protested the illegal acts and this process made poor fishers poorer.

The Daily *Ittefaq* published a news on 15 August 2001 highlighting violent conflicts occurred in Meherpur, a northwestern region of the country. The report says, 115 fishermen of the locality got lease of 103 acres of government water body (Khas land) for fish culture for several years. But in August 2001, few non-fisher influentials and power elite of the locality obstructed fish culture in the large water body by the fishers. They put bamboo poles across the water body and captured about 50 acres of land illegally with the help of terrorist gangs and started catching fish there. When the poor fisher came to protest, many of them were injured by the hired terrorists of the illegal occupants with deadly arms.

The other important news of violent conflicts against fishers included: *Political Clash and Terrorism behind Killing of two crore Fish Fingerlings in Jhenaidha* (published in the Dainik Janakantha on 17 August 2001); *Four People killed in a Clash for Capturing Ghats (fishing ground in river)* in Ittefaq on 23 January 2001; *Boundless Sufferings of Fishers in Dikshi Beel, Due to Exploitation and Terrorist Attacks by the Non-fishers Influential*, published in the Ittefaq on 27 November 2001; *Frequent Terrorist Attacks on Fishers in Sylhet*, published in the Janakantha on 23 November 2001; *Leaseholders Controls most of the Jalmahal (government water body) in Sunamganj district* (Ittefaq on 26 September 2000); *Fish, Nets and Fishing Boats Looted: Terrorist Attack in Raypur* (Dainik Sangbad on 13 July 2000); *Fifteen Injured in a Clash over Fishing in Sunamganj* (The Independent on 7 April 1999); *Hundred Thousand of Fishers are in Grip of Fear from the Leasees in Kishoreganj* (Bhorer Kagaj on 28 December 1992); *Fake Fishers Association of the Non-fishers Leasees captured 150 Jalmahals in Upper Riparian* (Northeastern part of the country),

published in the Dainki Bangla on 29 August 1992; The Cooperative Fisheries in Atrai Looted, published in the Inkiab on 4 April 1993.

2.2 Violent Conflicts in Coastal Shrimp

The emerging shrimp sector has been the major source of conflicts in Bangladesh fisheries. The table presented earlier also shows that the majority incidents reported in the newspapers occurred in the shrimp sector. The available literature reveals that lured by the very attractive rate of return, a large number of entrepreneurs from the urban areas leased in land from the farmers and set up shrimp farms in the coastal areas of Bangladesh, particularly in Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira and Cox's Bazar districts. In many cases, leasees forcefully occupied the land and the lease money was not paid duly that resulted in social conflicts and violent clash, which sometime caused killings of people in the past two decades. Violation of women by the guards of the Ghers has been common phenomenon around the shrimp farms. Many farmers who protested such violation of their rights were harassed and even sent to prison on fabricated charges (Ghafur MA, 1999).

The violation of legal rights has become a strong emotive issue among the population of the southwestern parts of Bangladesh and it was alleged that the leaseholders, vested interest quarter, the law enforcing agencies, local administration as well as the political elites work together against the interest of farmer, poor and women in the locality. There have been conflicts between shrimp and agriculture, between shrimp and local fisheries and also between shrimp and environment due to mainly increase of salinity in soil and surface as well as in the ground water. The presence of high level salinity in the soil and water has also badly affected the lives and livelihood of millions of the coastal regions. Few recent incidents of conflict have been described here.

In addition to the news paper report, the survey found two important unpublished report documenting many fearful cases of conflicts induced by shrimp cultivation. These are: Case Studies Reflecting Social Conflicts in the Shrimp Sector by Nijera Kori, Dhaka(1999) and Struggle against Gher Owner and Terrorism by the Gher Owners in South Khulna by Saha M (2000). The report of Nijera Kori documented seven cases of violent conflicts that caused several killings and injuries of many. The report also documented people's movement against unplanned and illegal shrimp farming in the southwestern part of the country. The cases documented in the report are: *Kachubania Shrimp Gher and Killing of Mawla Morhol*, *Ghinirabad Incident involving Ranokul Fakir*, *Double Murder for Control over Bidyar-Bahan Gher*, *Bill Tawalia Movement and Murder of Tozammel Haque*, *The Anti-shrimp Movement in Polder-22 and Killing of Karunamoyee Sarker*, *Baitiaghata Resistance and Murder of Jabber Shekh*, *Dohuri Movement and Murder of Govinda Dutta*.

The compilation by Saha, a renowned journalist of a Bangla National Daily included 33 cases of conflicts in shrimp sector. The report further says that 40 people had been killed in shrimp related violence in the southwestern region of the country during 1990-1995, while another 525 people were injured in such clash and eight women were reported to be raped in and around the shrimp farms by the guards and the employees of the *Ghers* (shrimp farm) during that time.

The literature survey collected several news of conflicts in shrimp sector and it was found that severe and violent conflict frequently occurred in the initial stage of shrimp farming in the 1980s when the sector was mainly controlled by the outside leaseholders. In the recent years, local farmers started shrimp farming in their own land and the number of conflicts has come down. Despite this, there have been many incidents, clash and conflicts in the shrimp farming areas. Few of the incidents have been described here briefly.

The *Sangbad*, reported clash and looting of shrimp from Chokoria in Cox's Bazar (south east part of the country) on 28 March in 2000. The report says that the miscreants of private shrimp owners looted fish and burned three houses of a farm owned and managed by a cooperative to ash on 24 March. Since then, armed cadres attacked each other several times and the neighboring villagers. They also looted cattle and poultry and other valuable goods of the opponent groups.

The *Dainik Ittefaq* on 4 November 2001 reported that extremist groups in Satkhira attacked the Gher workers and looted fishes from many shrimp farms at Kaliganj, Shamnagar, Tala and Ashasuni Upzilas in that district in October 2001.

Dainik Tatha, a local daily newspaper in Satkhira district on 11 September 1999 reported that landed farmers damaged a shrimp farm of a leasee at Tala Upzila and restored agriculture on their land. The report further says that one Mr. Anwarul of Kanaidia village managed to have lease of a canal, which connected Kalapara Beel with the local river and started shrimp farming forcefully in that large beel by flashing saline water into the beel. The affected farmers of the nearby villages organized themselves against the heinous act and logged a case against the leasee. On 9 July 2000, the affected farmers cut the dams of the farms and remove the saline water from their agri-land and started agricultural activities there.

The *Janakantha* on 24 April 1999 reported that power elite of Paikgacha in Khulna tried to convert agriland into shrimp field illegally, which resulted in violent clash in the locality. The report further mentioned that a vested interest quarter flashed water into vast area of cropland by putting plastic pipes under the flood protection embankment to convert the crop land of many poor and marginal farmers without informing the land owners. This incident created a conflicting situation in the locality. This group of people further closed a drainage canal of the locality as part of the shrimp farm activity, which affected navigation as well as fisheries of the locality. The villagers protested the events and the two feuding groups engaged in a clash on 9 April and many villagers were injured in the clash. The police and local administration favored few power elites, who illegally wanted to hamper the ecosystem and livelihood of many.

2.3 Conflicts of Fisheries with Agriculture and FCDI Projects

The survey found 43 news items on the conflicts of fisheries with agriculture and FCDI projects in the forms of access to and use of water for fishing and agricultural practices, particularly during the dry season. The news shows that the growing agricultural practices created enormous pressure on fish habitats in various ways. The

use of agro-chemicals has degraded wetland and affected fisheries. Further, irrigating water from river, canal and beel in the dry seasons for hybrid rice seriously affects wetland and fisheries. In the last two decades, Bangladesh experienced enormous growth of Flood Control, Drainage and Irrigation (FCDI) projects, which have seriously affected flow of water as well as decreased natural recruitment of fingerlings in the inland water bodies of the country.

The *Sangbad* on 8 January 2001 reported that the rivers, canals and beel of Nilphamary district have been dried and become devoid of fish due to continuous pumping out of water from many *Beels*, river and canals of district. Many farmers prepared seedbeds and started agricultural practices in the riverbeds, canal and dried land of once perennial beel. As a result ten thousand traditional fisher became jobless and faced serious economic hardship in the districts.

The *Sangbad* published another news on 8 October 2001 entitled, " Fish Resources in Narail District decreased greatly". The report pointed out that the major causes of decrease of fish resources in the locality included: indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides for agriculture leading to fish diseases and loss of fish population and use of current nets for fishing and killing of brood fish, particularly by the non-fishers.

The Independent published a news, which reported that widespread of fish disease due to indiscriminate use of chemical fertilizer and pesticide in agriculture in Chuadanga. It further reported that many rivers and canal of the locality have dried due to ill-designed construction of flood control structure as well as low flow of up stream water resulting in lack of fish in the district.

Bhorer Kagaj reported that there had been serious scarcity of fish in the rivers and major water bodies of the district, because of catching of fish fries and eggs for commercial purpose from the open water. Many non-fishers are involved in the illegal activities dyeing the existing fisheries rules of the country, which prohibited catching of fish egg and fish fries. The titles of other important news have been included in the appendix.

There had been many protests and struggle of fishers, NGOs and civil society groups against FCDI projects, particularly against the Flood Action Plan (FAP), which were documented by newspaper and NGOs. Rivers of Life is book published by the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Study (BCAS) and PANOS, London where a set of journalists expressed their critical opinions about different anti-environment and anti-people nature of FAP. The book also took a very critical look about the loss of fisheries due to FCDI and FAP.

Bangladesh is criss-crossed by more than 200 rivers, which are the lifeblood of its fertile delta and rich culture. Monsoon-season floods normally cover a third of the country in water, bringing invaluable benefits for agriculture, fishing and navigation. But in abnormal years, floods bring disaster. Fifteen donor countries and agencies launched the World Bank-coordinated Flood Action Plan (FAP) after unusually severe floods in 1987 and 1988. Supporters insist the scheme will tame the country's volatile rivers, saving lives and dramatically boosting food production. Critics warn that the proposed river embankments and other engineering works could cause

irreparable damage to the environment, displace millions of the country's poorest people and actually increase the danger of catastrophic flooding (Haggart K and others, 1994).

NGOs and civil society groups were very critical against the interventions to control rivers and floodplains through FAP activities. They were very active to influence policy and decision making process to remove anti-people and anti-environment nature of FAP through conducting study, consultation, advocacy and awareness raising among general mass. Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) played a leading role in this respect. BCAS and other think-tanks felt that the views of the farmers, fishermen, women and landless poor who have the best first-hand knowledge of floods were missing in the FAP process. To help fill this gap, the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies and Panos asked a group of Bangladeshi journalists to take an independent look at existing flood-control projects and the potential impact of new ones, which came with a good book on FAP.

Box-1: NGOs and Civil Society Movement Against FAP

The Coalition of Environmental NGOs (CEN) and the Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) organized a huge gathering in Dhaka called "People's Conference on FAP" on 27 November in 1995. The objectives of the conference were to hold open discussions about FAP by the ordinary people from the villages and towns, experts, journalists, donors of FAP projects, international NGOs, FAP consultants and national NGOs. The Conference openly discussed the three areas: (i) FAP process, (ii) Management of flood waters and (iii) Water Resource Management and Peoples' Participation. The "People's Conference on FAP" could be considered as a major success for CEN and ADAB in their advocacy campaign on FAP. The conference was able to bring the issue to the attention of policy makers and international donor agencies who were present at the Fourth FAP Conference organized by the government (Bangladesh Environmental News Letter, Vol.6 No.4, December 1995)

2.4 Institutional Weakness and Lack of Coordination affects Fisheries

Several news items published in the daily and weekly emphasized on the institutional weakness of the department of fisheries of government, which bears the main responsibility of developing this sector. The department lacks necessary expertise, skills and dynamism for proper development of the sector. The performance of ministry and the department of fisheries is very poor in enforcing the existing fisheries laws and regulations as well as to extension service in the sector. The sector further lack seriously inter agency coordination among the relevant ministries, departments and agencies such, land, agriculture, water, local government ministries and departments etc. The survey found 33 news items in this area and most of them were published between 1990-1999. Few important news have been summarized below.

The Ittefaq on 29 August 2001 reported that the development of fisheries and fish culture in Maulavibazar district was very unsatisfactory due to low extension service as well as lack of capable people in the district level office of fisheries.

The Iteffaq also published another report on failure of Chandpur Fisheries project on 26 September 2000. The report says that fish production in the project area decreased sharply mainly because of lack of coordination among Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Local Government and Engineering Department. It was also reported that the BWDB implemented the project activities with out proper consultation with other implementing agencies, particularly of the fisheries office as a result, availability of water and fish in the project area has been declined greatly.

2.5 Others Conflicts: Debt and Loss of Livelihoods of the Fishers

The new items also covered many other conflicting issues in the fisheries sectors including loss of livelihood of the fishers, exploitation of the poor fishers by the fish traders, money lenders, *Aratdar* (large fish traders who lend money to the poor fishers and force them to sell fish in low price), debt of fishers, serving the interest of the fake fisheries associations, village head, or community chief due to their weak position in the society etc. Over 30 news could be identified from the selected newspapers as other types of conflicts. Of them, 12 were published in 2001, while 13 were published in 2000.

The *Methobarta* published from Pirojpur a southern district of Bangladesh reported that poor fishers of this district were indebted to the moneylender and faced harassment. The report came out on 16 May in 2001. The fishers are victims of *Dadon*, a type of money lending, where the fisher are bound to sell their catch in low price to the *Dadondar or Aratdar* to pay their loan. It was also reported that many fishers, who could not refund their load due to low catch and economic hardship, fleeing from their house by the fear of the moneylenders.

3. Causes of Conflicts

The underlying causes of nearly all conflicts have been the issues of access to and allocation of resources. This is almost true for Bangladesh. Unequal competition for control and getting access to fisheries resources, and unfair allocation of the fisheries resources to some vested quarters very often lead to conflicts in fisheries. Local government, District Commissioner (land), Departments and Ministries of Fisheries and Land are responsible for allocating the resources through leasing out of different public water bodies. Further entitlements of poor and fishers to fisheries resources provide the basis understanding the access to the resources and the development of conflicts in fisheries.

The major causes of conflicts in inland fisheries reported in the newspapers included competition for control over fisheries resources and illegal occupying fishing ground, leasing water bodies illegally by non-fishers with money and muscle power, toll collection and corruption by the related government officials, exploitation of the fishers by the leaseholders and vested quarters, political and social rivalry, influx of new fishers, institutional weakness and unfair allocation of resources etc. The major causes of conflicts in shrimp sector include: encroachment of agriland and forestland for shrimp farm, competition for control over shrimp farm, intrusion of saline water, cutting of dam/ embankment, closing canals, rivers affecting local fisheries and

navigation, exploiting farmers and wage labour, violating rights of women and the poor, anti-shrimp movement, pressure on natural resources and eco-systems, political rivalry, fake and false court cases against farmers and the poor, attack of the extremists etc. The nature and role of the institutions in the context of allocating the fisheries resources are key to understand the cause and trends of conflicts.

4. Existing Mode of Conflict Resolution

The reports in newspapers very often did not describe the mode of conflict resolution. It was reported that in few cases court cases were suited to stop clash and conflicts but those did not resolve conflicts rather it creates further tension among different feuding groups and sometime becomes a source of conflict. It was found that the conventional method of conflict resolution facilitated by the community leaders and villages heads rather functions well.

A recent participatory study of CEMARE and BCAS on consensus building in natural resources management in Bangladesh collected several good examples of conflict resolution and consensus building in fisheries, where NGOs played a very important role to organize the poor and marginal fishers to strengthening their understanding, cooperation and taking a strong position to protest exploitation and domination and protecting their own interests. For example, more than hundred Hindu fishers families in Brahmanbaria lost their traditional riparian rights to catch fish in the river Titas in the past few years, where new Muslim fishers from other village started fishing forcefully. Violent clash occurred several times when the poor peripheral Hindu fishers wanted to retain their right of catching fish in the river very close to the Hindu village and every times, the Hindus were defeated. In the recent years, the fishers were mobilized socially and organized under the Community Based Fisheries Management (CBFM) project by the implementing NGO at the grassroots level and community levels to protest the illegal occupancy. The fisher community first united themselves, created a common understanding and then communicated the village heads, other community leaders, mainly the Muslims and the members of the local government. Everybody got a clear and common understanding against the illegal occupancy by the other villagers and finally they negotiated with the rival group, who understood their mistake and peacefully left the fishing ground for the traditional fishers. This sort of facilitated approach of conflict resolution could be applied creatively to other areas of conflict resolution.

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