

Reported Feedback from Char Dwelling Farmers on Livelihood Activities in Covid-19 Lock Down Period

Introduction

There was a request from Ms. Farhana Urmi, IFAD, Dhaka, whether we can share some evidenced based information about how char dwellers are performing their livelihood activities during nationwide Covid-19 lock down situation. In response to that request, M&E unit of CDSP B(AF) have organized couple of case study interviews with char dwellers to know how they are performing their livelihood activities. In conducting case study to get images of events taking place in the field, online technologies i.e. Smart phones, IMO conversation software and internet have been used. As we have to stay in our home, we have hired a local volunteer - Md. Imran Hossain, Ex. Field Investigator, CDSP who has worked in one of AOS round. Mr. Imran has used his smart phone to take images of events from field locations (of selected households) nearest to his residence. He has been advised to take every coronavirus protection compliance during his short voluntary assignment (2 days). Mr. Imran used IMO software for sending images to our two M&E Officers who have sent those images to Mr. Mijan, MIS/CS, who finally has sent those images to the MEKM Adviser who has compiled the case studies based on telephonic interviews with beneficiaries by our two MEOs based on a short check list (Refer to Annex-I) developed by the MEKM Adviser.

Summary of findings

The first case of Covid-19 attack was identified on 8 March 2020. The Government declared a nationwide lock-down from 26 March 2020. Several times since then the lock-down has been extended. All CDSP B staff, like others, have been working online where possible. This short report has been produced based on couple of case studies on selected char dwellers/farmers of Boyer Char. Case study interviews have been taken by two project M&E officers through telephonic discussions and field photos have been taken by a volunteer. Interviews conducted based on selected indicators built in a checklist (Refer to Annex-I).

Data reported by the case study farmers reveal that, due to the Covid-19 lock down, farmers have been seriously affected due to being unable to market their products. The char farmers are highly dependent on the sale proceeds from fresh vegetables and other crops. All case study farmers reported similar types of marketing problems. The char dwellers who are day labourers and earn income from providing labour services in crop fields and other places are in serious problems. The second case study farmer (Mr. Didar) reported that he earned Tk. 81,000 last year through day labour. But this year he has been at home since March due to the Covid-19 lock down.

In the case of poultry farms, some rearers have to sell birds at a very low price and suffered losses. The farmer in case study 1 made a loss of Tk. 30,000 in March, but then made a net profit of Tk. 30,000 in May. This farmer has also sold fish fry to neighbours at Tk. 13,000/- from her small pond. So, when a farmer has multiple ways of generating income, he is in a better position to cope with the Covid-19 crisis and resulting shocks.

Required inputs like seeds, fertilizers, pesticides are available in local shops. They purchase those physically from those shops ensuring proper Covid-19 protection like wearing masks and maintaining social distances.

Farmers reported that they are getting technical supports via the telephone from CDSP B projects sector specialists. Farmers have not stopped their work in the field, and are preparing their land for next crops and vegetables. Because of this they will be able live on food produced by themselves. In char areas there is no industry where they can get jobs for extra earnings.

The case study farmers reported that they have not received any relief material due to the Covid-19 lock down situation.

Case studies

The following case studies illustrate how three sample households have been continuing their livelihood activities in lock-down situation due to Covid-19. The primary data have been gathered through telephonic interviews. Interview for case study-1 has been done by Ms. Khaleda Aktar,, M&E Officer, The interviews for case study-2 and case study-3 have been done by Md. Abdul Kader, M&E Officer,

Case study 1

Ms. Rina Akter and her husband Md. Ahsanullah of West Rasulpur, Boyer Char, Hatiya, Noakhali (mobile: +88 01777 443515) are project beneficiaries of CDSP B(AF). Their family size is five – with two 2 male and three female members. During Covid-19 lock down situation, they are operating their two shed-poultry farm maintaining fully coronavirus compliance for protection as well as they are looking after pond for fish culture.

At the start of the crisis in March 2020 they had 1400 birds. Due to coronavirus lock down, they had difficulty marketing these birds as traders (pikers) very seldom called at the farm. As a result had to sell 1200 birds for only Tk.95,000, suffering a loss of Tk. 30,000. However in March they purchased another 1400 chicks and reared those in the two sheds. In the second week of May they have sold these 1400 birds for a total of Tk.130,000, and made a net profit of Tk. 30,000.

Rina and her husband also have a small pond (18 decimal) where they do fish culture, rearing rui, katla and kali boush fish. In April they sold 80 kg fish fry to neighbours for Tk. 13,000. In addition they have very small plot of land (20 decimal) where they cultivate vegetables such as brinjal and papaya, mainly for their own consumption.

Ms. Rina Akter reported that their neighbours are also suffering from marketing problems. But pond owners are looking after their ponds and regularly feeding their fish stock. Rina gratefully acknowledged technical supports provided by CDSP sector specialists through telephone discussions and advice.

Ms. Rina Akter reported that they have not received any relief from the Government agencies or NGOs. They are maintaining social distances in home and in public places like the market/bazaar, and hospitals/clinics.



Case study 2

Md. Diar Hossain and his wife Ms. Nasima Begum of East Rasulpur, Boyer Char, Hatiya, Noakhali (mobile: +88 01777 443515) are project beneficiaries of CDSP B(AF). Their family size is six, having five male and one female members. During Covid-19 lock down situation they are taking care of their livestock farm and vegetable garden ensuring full coronavirus compliance for protection. They are looking after their kids with love and affection.

Didar's family owns 120 decimals of cultivable land. They are cultivating two types of paddy- Swarna and Hudaina IRRRI (from Lal Teer seeds). They have vegetables on a small patch of land, where there is still some cucumber and country bean plants from last season. They cannot sell vegetables due to lack of traders (pikers). When they work in the vegetable garden they use masks to be protected from Covid-19. Didar is a day labourer, which earned him Tk. 81,000 last year. Now, he is now unemployed. There is no scope for employed work due to Covid-19 situation. At present all he can do is work on his own land and take care of 5 COWS.



Didar and his wife jointly are rearing five cattle (of which two are cows for milking). Recently, they have sold one cow for Tk. 48,000. They are selling surplus milk, but this only earns them Tk. 1200-1500 per month.

They maintain Covid-19 protection behaviour, strictly maintaining social distances. They use masks when working in the field and going outside in case of any emergency needs. It is reported that their neighbours are also maintaining social distances when working and only moving out in emergencies. Neighboring farmers are also working in their fields to some extent. All farmers are suffering problems in selling their produce due to the coronavirus lock down. They have not received any kind of relief from Government agencies or NGOs.

Case study 3

Md. Yusuf, and his wife Ms. Hosneara Begum of Rasulpur, Boyer Char, Hatiya, Noakhali (mobile: +88 01836963095) are project beneficiaries of CDSP B(AF). Their family size is six, with three male and three female members. Mr. Yusuf is a caretaker-cum-supervisor of an integrated agricultural farm. During the Covid-19 lock down situation, he is still looking after farm activities though marketing of farm produce is now seriously limited now due to the Covid-19 lock down.

The owner of the farm lives at Maizdee town, and Yusuf takes care of all farm activities. The major farm components are cattle rearing (five cows), poultry birds (120 chicken and 50 ducks) and crops including paddy. Major vegetables grown are tomatoes, jhinga, cucumber, papaya, spinach (pui shak, palong shak).

Mr. Yusuf says that marketing farm produce is the main problem. He is losing a lot of perishable vegetables like tomatoes, spinach and beans. Traders are not coming from neighboring districts. At present he is busy with cleaning and weeding vegetable fields, feeding chicks, and stocking fish ponds with fingerlings. Input materials like fish feed, poultry feeds, fertilizers and pesticides are still available in local markets. He expects that the Government will soon partially withdraw the lock down.

As a salaried employee (earning Tk.12,000 per month) he would likely to continue all farm activities. He is maintaining full coronavirus compliance during work and when going outside farm he always wears masks and advises other to follow this practice.



Annex-I: Checklist for Telephonic Interview in Covid-19 Lock Down Situation

**Checklist for Telephonic Interview with Project Beneficiaries
in Covid-19 Lock Down Situation**

1. Farmer's name: Gender:
2. Spouse's name: Gender:
3. HH family members: Total: Male: Female
4. Mobile No. _ _ _ _ _
5. Address: - - - - -
6. Cultivating crops:
 - 6a. Land for Rice/Paddy: -- decimal
 - 6b. Land for vegetables: -- decimal
 - 6c. Pond for fish culture: -- decimal
 - 6d. Types of vegetables:
 - 6e. Rearing poultry birds:
7. Information about neighbouring farmers
8. Any problem in selling vegetable/paddy/fish etc.
9. Facing any problem due to COVID-19
10. Do they use masks when working or going outside?
11. Do they maintain social distances?
12. Did you receive any kinds of relief/supports from Govt./any NGOs