

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS OF FISHERS' COMMUNITY AT DEKHAR HAOR IN SUNAMGANJ DISTRICT OF BANGLADESH

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Abstract

A study was conducted to assess the socioeconomic status of fishers' community at Dekhar *haor*, in Sunamganj of Bangladesh for a period of 9 months from April to December 2014. It was done by questionnaire interviews (QI) of fishers, focus group discussions (FGD), key informant interviews (KII) and secondary data collection. Socioeconomic status of fishers' community in Dekhar *haor* was presented in terms of family size and type, occupational status, educational status, housing condition, drinking water facilities, sanitary facilities, credit facilities and annual income etc. Most of the fishers were belonged to the age groups of 10 to 30 years (55%), represented by 80% Muslim. Over 70% of the fishers primary occupation was fishing, 20% was engaged in agriculture and 5% in daily labour, 1% in business activities and 4% unemployed. About 57% of the fishers were only could write name while 7%, 26% and 10% of the fishers were illiterate, primary and secondary level of education, respectively. The highest 90% fishers were living in tin roof with bamboo wall where only 8% were living in tin roof with brick wall house. About 75% of the fishers used semi-pakka while 15% used pakka and 5% of the fishers had no sanitary toilet facilities. It was found that only 20% of the fishers received health service from village doctors, 20% from upazila health complex, 38.50% from Kobiraj, 11.50% from homeopath medicine and remaining 10% got health service from private doctors. Most of the fishers of the *haor* basin used neighborhood tube-well for drinking water. The highest number (74%) of the fishers' annual income ranged between 40,000 and 60,000 BDT. It was also revealed that illiteracy and lack of awareness were the major constraints. For the betterment of socioeconomic status of fishers, spreading out of education, health and sanitation, loan amenities from the government agencies and upgraded management of the local resources are suggested.

Keywords: Fishers, socioeconomic, constrains, Dekhar *haor*.

Introduction

Fisheries sector plays a significant role on the socioeconomic improvement of Bangladesh from time immemorial. This sector contributes 3.69% of total GDP, 22.60% in agricultural GDP and 2.01% export earnings of the country as well as 60% of the national animal protein consumption (DoF, 2015). *Haor* wetlands are highly productive ecosystems and important breeding grounds for indigenous fishes (Karim, 1993). They serve as a sieving system for polluted water, afford fertile soils where people can grow a wide range of staple foods and provide grazing areas and fuel. The dynamic interaction of terrestrial and aquatic systems makes these wetlands highly valuable environmentally (Nishat, 1993). *Haors*, which are bowl shaped depressions between the natural levees of a river subject to monsoon flooding every year, are mostly found in the north-eastern region of the country, known as *haor* basin covering an area of approximately 24,500 km. There are altogether 411 *haors* comprising an area of about 8000 km² dispersed in the districts of Sunamganj, Sylhet, Moulvibazar, Habiganj, Netrokona and Kishoreganj.

Fish and fisheries are indispensable part in the livelihoods of the people of Bangladesh and it is the part of our cultural heritage (Ali *et al.*, 2008). Livelihood is made up of the capabilities, activities, and assets (both material and social resources) that contribute to a means of living (Islam *et al.*, 2013). The livelihood comprise the capabilities, the assets (natural, physical, human, financial and social), the activities and the accesses to these that together determine the living gained by the individual household (Chambers and Conway, 1992). Socioeconomic status of

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fishermen mostly depends on fisheries resources (CNRS, 2006). The fishermen are one of the most vulnerable communities in Bangladesh. They are poor by any standard and over the year's economic condition of the fishers had further deteriorated. Fishing is the main source of income of the *haor* adjacent fishermen household. But the fishermen cannot catch fish properly due to unavailability of fish as well as economic, social and technical constraints. The fishermen are very important communities, they lives hand to mouth and considered as the poorest among the poor (Kabir et al., 2013). All the times they have to struggle to survive. Thus the socioeconomic status of the fishermen is not so good. They are not capable to earn sufficient amount of money to meet basic needs (Alam, 2005). In Bangladesh, about 17.8 million people (11% of total population) directly or indirectly depend on fisheries sector for their livelihood (DoF, 2015). A sustainable livelihood approach is a way of thinking about the objectives, scope and priorities for development, in order to enhance progress in poverty eradication approach helps to reduce poverty as well as find out the way to upsurge income (Scones, 1998). For proper development of fishing community, it is essential to understand the baseline information to initiate proper developmental steps and improve the livelihood of fishermen. Considering the financial hardship and other complexities of the rural fishers, it is important to analyze their socioeconomic status. But, there is no sufficient information about livelihood of fishermen community in Dekhar *haor* of Bangladesh. In view of the above consideration, the present study was undertaken to determine the socioeconomic status of the fishers and to identify the socioeconomic constrains allied with fishing.

Materials and Methods

Study area, duration and data collection: The present study was conducted to assess the socioeconomic status and constraint faced by the fishers in Dekhar *haor* of Sunamganj Sadar upazila and Dakhin Sunamganj upazila under Sunamganj district during the period from April to December 2014. The present research was a cross-sectional study and it was based on collection of primary and secondary data. There were 200 fishermen (both the professional and subsistence) selected from the villages surrounding in Dekhar *haor*. The simple random sampling method was used to frame the target population from the study places. A questionnaire included the questions on the socio-demographic condition, income of fishers, family size and members, factors affecting the livelihood of the respondents and other relevant aspects of fishers was considered to collect primary data. To improve the quality and reliability of the information collected from the household survey, multiple methodological PRA tools such as Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Crosscheck Interviews (CI) with key informants (KI) were conducted properly. Secondary data were collected from various policy reports, commune's annual reports and from various scientific articles.

Data analysis: The collected data were scrutinized and summarized carefully before the actual tabulation. The data were processed to undergo statistical analysis using SPSS 22 windows program. Microsoft Word, Microsoft Excel were used to represent the tabular and graphical forms to understand the present socioeconomic status and constraints of the fishers of the studied area in Dekhar *haor*.

Results and Discussion

Socioeconomic status of the fishers in the haor area: The socioeconomic status of the fishers was the main aspect of this study, emphasizing on religion, age structure, educational status, occupational status, family size, family type, housing condition, drinking water facilities, sanitary facilities, credit facilities, income and other socio-economic issues. The total fishers were 200 for questionnaire interviews. Sample size was taken about 50% from individual interview, 30% from focus group discussion (FGD) and 10% from cross-check interviews with the key informants.

Human capital

Religion: It was found from the survey that 80% of fishers were Muslim and 20% were Hindu (Fig. 1). No Buddhist or Christian was found in the study areas. According to Faroque (2006), most of the people of Borobela beel were Muslims which supports the present study. He reported that the percentages of Muslims, Hindus and others in his study area were 80%, 12.5% and 7.5%, respectively, which was agreed to findings of the present study.

Age structure: Different categories of age groups are young (10 - 30 years), middle aged (31 - 50 years) and old (51 - 60 years) were considered to examine the age structure. It was observed that age group of 10 - 30 years was the highest (55%) and 51 - 60 years was the lowest (17%) considering all fishers (Fig. 2). Ali et al. (2009) found that

most of the fish farmers (50%) belong to age group of 31 to 40 years in Mymensingh district. Bhaumik and Saha (1994) reported that age structure of fishers at Sundarbans was ranged from 20 to 70 years which was more or less similar with the present findings.

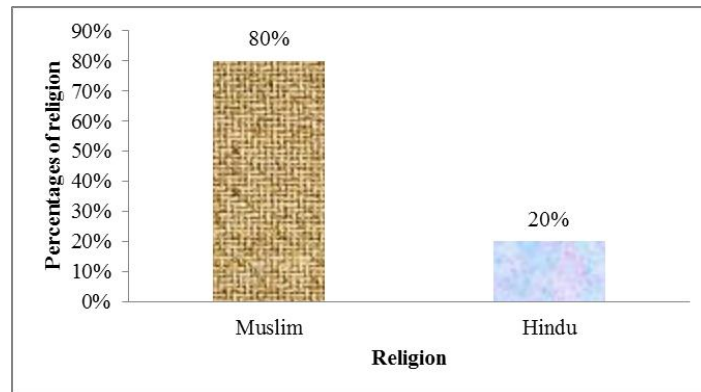


Fig.1. Religious status of the fishers in Dekhar haor.

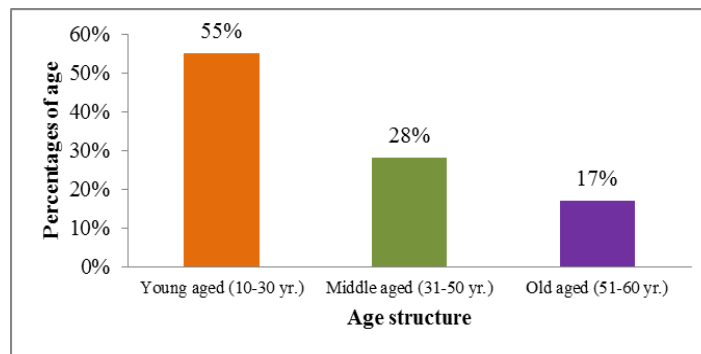


Fig. 2. Age distribution of the fishers in the study area.

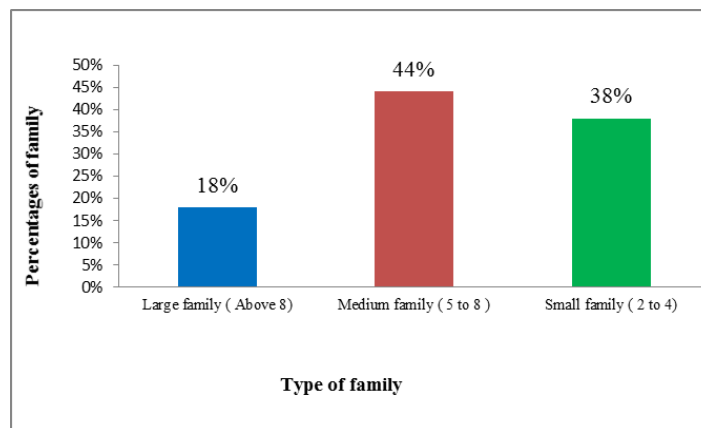


Fig. 3. Family size of respondents.

Family size: Family size is an important socioeconomic indicator as it affects the income, food consumption and socioeconomic wellbeing of the households. The family size of the fishers was divided into three categories as small, medium and large according to the number of the family members (Fig. 3). It was found from the survey that about 38% of the fishers had small family size with 2 - 4 members, 44% had medium family size with 5 - 8 members and 18% had large family size with above 8 members. The family size is much bigger compared to others areas and communities of Bangladesh as because they were economically poor. The highest percentage (45%) of

family size was belonged in the 4 - 5 member's family in Mymensingh district (Ali et al., 2009), which was similar with the present study.

Educational status: Literacy level can play a vital role in efficient management and operation of farming activities. It was found from the study that most of the fisherman of Dekhar haor was illiterate. About 57% people can sign where 7% people were totally illiterate (Fig. 4). Primary level is now free access for the local people. About 26% people were primary level passed where only 10% people were secondary level passed. According to the survey by Hossain (2007) on socioeconomic conditions of Kolimar haor fishers reported that the educational level 66.67% of the haor fishers were illiterate, 30% of them had primary and 3.33% of them had secondary level of education, which was more or less similar with the present findings.

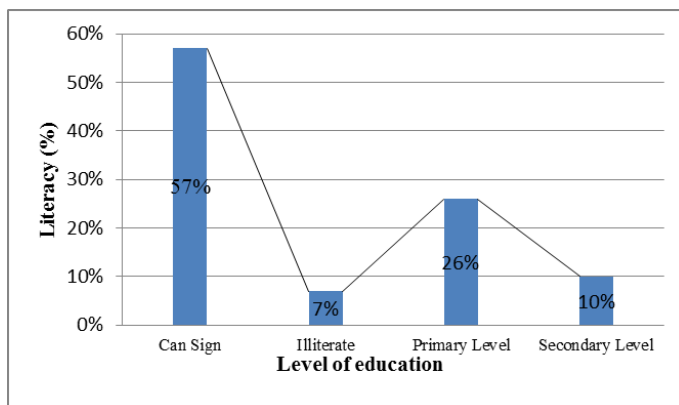


Fig. 4. Educational status of fishers.

Natural capital: Natural capital of the fishers represents the natural resources such as land, water, timber and wider environmental goods that are critical for fishers and associated groups to support production (Ali et al., 2009). Rapid population growth has led to accelerate capital depletion that has affected their income in the haor fishers of the study area.

Occupational status: In Dekhar haor people were involved in both agriculture and fisheries activities. Some people were involved in only fisheries and some people were involved in seasonal agriculture. There was some diversification among the occupation. The people depend on different occupations on the basis of fishing season and off season. In off season some people go to other areas as day labourer for agricultural activities. But in fishing season, their main earning purpose was fishing and selling them into market. From the present study, there were 70% people who were involved in only fishing, 20% people were involved in agriculture, 5% were involved as day labourer, 1% were in engaged business purpose and 4% were unemployed (Fig. 5). Kamruzzaman and Hakim (2016) reported that most of respondents (72.86%) were engaged in fishing while agriculture 10% and daily labour 17.14% in Dhaleshwari River, which is consistent to the present study.

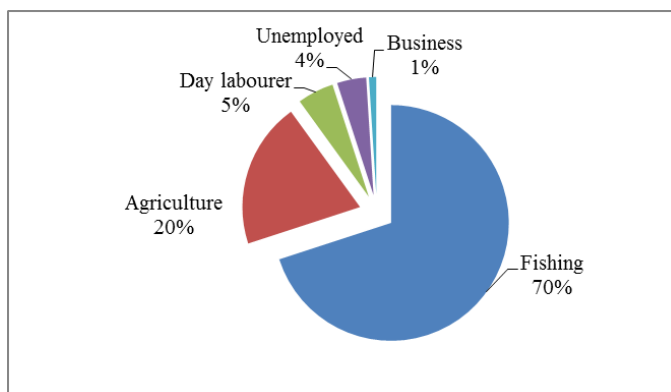


Fig. 5. Occupational status of fishers.

Annual income: Income is the most important factor for better understanding of the socioeconomic conditions of fishermen. The fishers of Dekhar *haor* region were classified into three groups based on their annual income. These were highest income, medium income, and lowest income group. The highest annual income group was considered above 100,000 Tk where medium and lowest annual income group was ranged from 61,000 - 100,000 Tk and 40,000 - 60,000 Tk, respectively. In the present study, there were only 7% respondents who were highest annual income earner (above 100,000 Tk), 19% were medium income earner (61,000 - 100,000 Tk) and 74 % were lowest income earner (40,000 - 60,000 Tk) (Fig. 6). It was also revealed that the total income is insufficient to provide adequate means of livelihood. A survey of annual income was also carried out by Kundu (2007) on the prawn farmers in Khulna district. He collected a data on average income of the locality of the Khulna districts and found the annual income of the prawn farmers ranged from Tk 30,000 to 1, 30,000 with an average of Tk 80,000, which was agreed to the present findings.

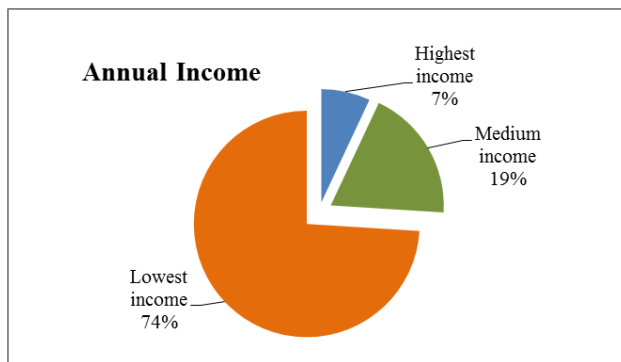


Fig. 6. Annual income of fishers in Dekhar haor.

Annual expenditure: The highest expenditure of the income of the people of *haor* area was food. They spent 80% of their income on the food item and 11.67% on health care (Fig. 7). A very little money has been spent on clothing (5%), entertainment (1.67%) and education (1.67%). A matter of sorrow is that they do not want to spend money on study purpose. They send their children into school at nearby government primary school. But after primary level, a very few children may go to secondary school.

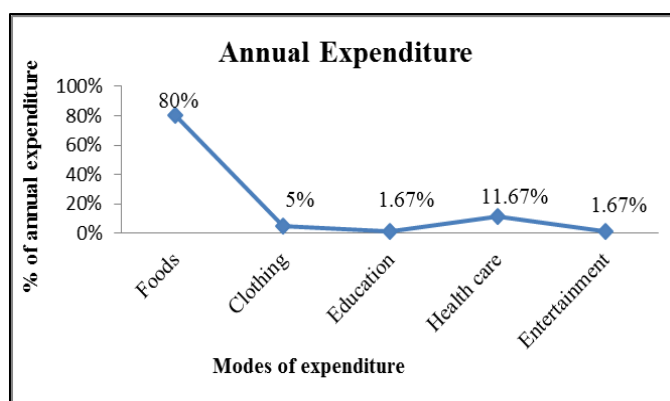


Fig. 7. Annual expenditure of respondents.

Involvement of fishing on the basis of sex category: The observed male and female fishers in the study area were 96% and 4%, respectively. Among the fishers, it was found that most of the women were involved in domestic activities (cooking, washing clothes, rearing of children etc.) and gear making.

Physical capital

Land area: Land area of the fishers was classified into 4 groups i.e. small sized land (1 - 40 decimal), medium sized land (41 - 80 decimal), large sized land (above to 81 decimal) and no land. It was found that 88% people had no land of their own. Small sized land owners were about 6% whereas both the middle and large sized land owners were about 3% (Table 1). Kamruzzaman and Hakim (2016) reported that majority of the fishermen (46%) had landless, while 38% of them had 1 - 20 decimal lands and only 16% had above 20 decimal lands, which is partially supported to the present study. Usually the landless fishermen live in government land (khas land) and they were unable to buy land due to very low income.

Table 1. Cultivable land area of the fishers in Dekhar haor.

Group	Area (Decimal)	Land owners (%)
Small sized land	1 to 40	6%
Middle	41 to 80	3%
Large	Above 81	3%
No land		88%
Total		100%

Housing condition: The nature of house indicates the social status of the people. During the survey attempts were made to find out the condition of living house of the people. In the locality, 90% people were living in tin roof with bamboo wall where lower portion of the house was mud made (Fig. 8). Moreover, 8% were living in tin roof with brick wall and 2% were living in others (most of *kacha* house). A study on Meghna River by Mia et al. (2015) is somewhat different from the present study. They reported that the socioeconomic condition of fishers of Meghna river was in a detrimental condition. About 75% people lived in *kacha* house where 7.5% had half building house in study area and in another place 80% people had lived in *kacha* house where 2.5% lived on half building house.

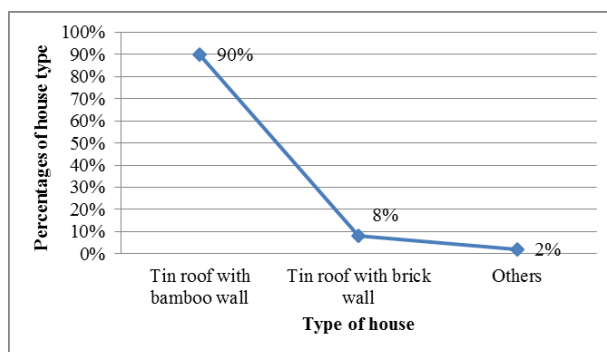


Fig. 8. Housing status of the fishers in Dekhar haor.

Sanitation facilities: There were two types of sanitation facilities available in *haor* basins that are service latrine and Semi-*pakka* latrine. From the present study, most of the facility has got from NGO's. They gave some ring-slab and people were using this ring-slab as their sanitary latrine. Most of the people (75%) were using semi-*pakka* latrine. But there were 15% people who were using *pakka* latrine and 5% people were using open field or no latrine. The present study was revealed that the sanitary conditions of the fishermen were not satisfactory in the study area. Ali et al. (2009) was observed 62.5% of the farmers had semi-*pakka*, 25% had *kacha* and 12.5% had *pakka* latrine in a study. These findings are more or less similar to the present study.

Drinking water facility: The provision of clean and safe drinking water is considered to be the most valued elements in the society. Most of the people of the *haor* basin have to access nearby *haor* or tube-well for drinking water. They have no tap water facility from government or any organization. A small number of households depended on rain water.

Medical facilities: The people of Dekhar *haor* were living below poverty line. The health facilities of the fishers in the study area were poor. Though there were 2 upazila hospitals in the study areas but the health facilities enjoyed by the fishermen were not satisfactory. The result of survey is that 20% people get medical facilities from upazila sadar hospital, 38.50% people go to nearby Kobiraj, 11.50% go for homeopath medicine, 20% people go to village doctor, and rest of 10% people goes to private doctor for their treatment (Fig. 9). Generally fishermen took health suggestions from unskilled, non professional village quack doctor and Kobiraj. Kamruzzaman and Hakim (2016) was observed that health services taking from 17.14% Kobiraj, 65.71% village quack doctor, 14.29% upazila health complex and 2.86% MBBS doctor in Dhaleshwari River fishing community, which is partly agreed to present study.

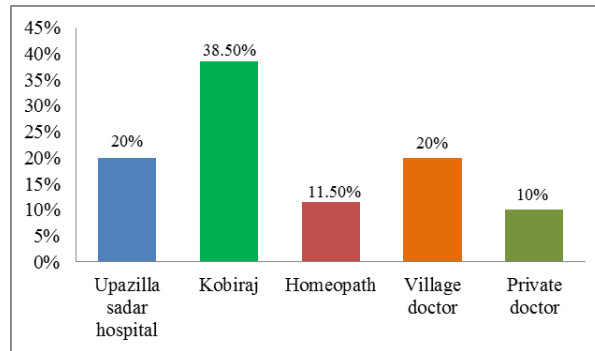


Fig. 9. Medical facilities of respondents.

Electricity facilities: The present study revealed that maximum (76%) fishers of Dekhar *haor* was used electricity facilities. On the other hand, only 24% was not able to get electricity facilities. The maximum (62%) fish farmers had electricity facilities in Rajshahi district reported by Ali *et al.* (2010), which is more or less consented to the present findings.

Organizational linkage: Sunamganj sadar upazila and Dakhin sunamganj upazila have a number of NGOs. The workers of these NGOs are doing many constructive works. They have already started some new project as “Ekti bari ekti khamar” where they are giving one cow with 10 ducks and one goat with five ducks among the poor people. It is such a wonderful job that should be praised. An NGO named “HIRA” gave some ring to set up toilet in a village named Sadarpur. There are some other organizations such as FIVDB, SUMOTI and CVRMP that has started their developing work in Sunamganj, which is positive sign for involvement in social activities of the fishers’ community.

Socioeconomic constraints of the fishers: The fishers of Dekhar *haor* were encountered by many constraints in terms of livelihood status. The main constraints were extortion by the local extortionist, inadequate credit facility, inadequate communication aid during fishing trip, lack of marketing facilities, lack of knowledge of fishing, lack of appropriate gears, reduction in fish catches in recent years, low wage rate in fishing and fishing related activities, limited access to land for home and crop cultivation, and disturbances by thieves and robbers. Most of the fishers were very poor and they had inadequate resource to buy nets and other fishing equipments. They were ignored in all respect in the society. Most of them were unschooled and lived from hand to mouth. Being very underprivileged, their children often go for fishing rather than going to school. *Haor* localities have no cultural organization till now. The existence of cultural organization would facilitate the entertaining facility of the fishers and which would also augment the awareness of fishers on the healthiness, sanitation and education.

The socioeconomic status of the fishers’ community in Dekhar *haor* was not satisfactory. The fishers were underprivileged of many amenities. They were not aware of proper sanitation system, education, nutritional status and even their health conditions. The education level of the fishers was very poor due to lack of awareness as well as the poor income of the fisher’s families. The educational status and facilities should be improved in the adjacent area. The Government should take some important steps by providing some sorts of management policy as well as providing of some extra providence. Some forms of NGO’s activity must be ensured in the adjacent area for the enhancement of the life leading status of the fishers. The NGO’s must be supportive about socioeconomic status of the fishers engaged in the providence of the loan which may be used for the upgradation of the income procedure. If the fishers get proper training programs, credit facilities on easy terms and condition, more profitability would be

reflected. It is therefore recommended that Government and other support organizations should take initiatives to uphold their socioeconomic condition for the betterment of livelihood of fishers' community in Dekhar *haor*.

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