



IFI WATCH BANGLADESH

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**Bangladesh Working Group on
International Financial Institutions and Trade Organizations**

The Development Disaster Waterlogging in the Southwest region of Bangladesh

The Locked life

It is not astounding that the same water is life saving and life killing. Without water life cannot exist. But how much is required? People are dying for want of water as well as people are dying for the cause of water like flooding, tsunami, tornado etc. No one knows better than the people of southwest coastal region of Bangladesh that water can bring complete disaster.

Millions of lives in this region become completely stagnant. Now their life is on water. It is unbelievable that it is not natural calamities like flooding or tsunami. It is truly man-made.

Millions of people's lives are shoved at complete uncertainty. The basic necessities of life are absent. There is water everywhere but not drinking water. Diseases, malnutrition and environmental degradation are common

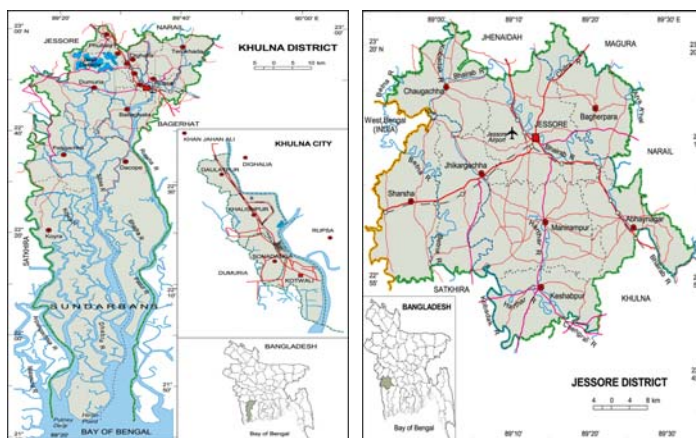
phenomenon. Even the famine of 1941/42 could not touch the areas are now survived by relief and other human supports. The same scenario prevails in 274 villages of 17 unions under Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira districts (CDP: 2006). Waterlogging is an ever- threat that is fast gaining in intensity in this southwest Coastal region. Millions of people especially poor & landless farmers, sharecroppers, agricultural wage labourers,

petty traders and others lost their livelihoods security. Water logging rotted the roots of trees, and salinity killed off all vegetation, fruit trees died off, agriculture was drastically reduced and even homesteads vegetation and cattle rearing become

impossible. Most of the rivers have dried up. This is a case of complete human disaster. But who cares?

The silent cry on the costal front

Water logging may not be rare in the country, which is temporary in nature. It is true but who will believe that one million



Severely affected two district: Khulna & Jessore

people of 8 upazilas (sub-district) of Khulna, Jessore and Satkhira district namely Abhoyanagar, Monirampur, Keshobpur, Dumuria, Tala, Phultala and Daulatpur are the victims of water logging for the last 35 years. Instead of improving the situation their condition is decreasing every year. In current year water logging has been spreaded to Kolaroa, Jhikorgachha and Sharsha.

For the heavy pour of September and November in 2005, around 10,825 hectares of cultivable land of 184 villages of Abhoyanagar, Manirampur and Keshobpur Upazila under Jessore district went under water.

2, 87,200 people of 57,445 families became water logged and began to lead an inhumane life.

For last one year government did virtually nothing to ease the situation. The situation further deteriorates during the present year rainy season, which resulted in adding more people in the queue of sufferings. Besides the aforesaid three upazilas of Jessore, the new villages of Jhikorgachha and Sharsha; Kolaroa and Tala of Satkhira district; Phultala and Dumuria of Khulna district became affected.

80% houses of affected areas, roads and village paths, educational institutes, clinic and hospitals, religious institutes are under water. Only in Jessore district 250 km village path and 32 km road have severely



Waterlogged School

affected. Although most people of the affected areas are peasants, no

single crop was produced in nearly 20,000 hectares of cultivable land.

People are living on road sides (though there very few roads are above water) in the temporary house made up of polyethylene, chatai made of bamboo. Those who are still in their homestead are living on mancha (one kind of bamboo-made high stage like).

The total damage of crops and infrastructures are about 500 crore.

More than 500 schools and colleges are remained closed for last one year. 60% tube-wells;

75% latrines are under water.

Various diseases especially water-born diseases like diarrhoea, decentre, skin diseases spreaded everywhere.

Drinking water has become very precious for the locality as most of the tube wells are under water.

Situation is very critical for children, old people and patients. While taking to the affected people in Sujatpur they indicating some very old and some children that what can they do in this ocean? Always there exists a fear among the parents that their children can fall in the water. Even in some cases, to avoid any bad incident, parents are using rope to fasten their children.

To escape from attack of snakes and other insects some people use fishing net around their bed when they go to sleep.

In majority of water-logged people had to use same place for bathroom, washing, taking bath and other daily activities

Most of the cottages especially those are made of mud and straw destroyed.

Most households are suffering from food crisis. It is to be noted that present waterlogged areas were food surplus region. Even the famine of 1941/42 could not touch these areas.



Who will think of them?

- ☒ Some waterlogged areas are used as aquaculture, locally known as gher by influential people.
- ☒ The land ownership pattern has been changed. Marginal farmers became landless, small farmers became marginal and in some cases landless
- ☒ To have a source of income become has become extremely tough. They want a job for survive. What the nature of job would be not a matter to them at the moment. They want to feed their unfed children and belongings.
- ☒ Most people of waterlogged areas are Hindu. Some of them migrated to India and some migrated to other places in the country. This disintegrated the family life.
- ☒ Environmental degradation has taken place. Many trees are dying due long period of water logging. Entire Biodiversity of the areas has fallen under serious threat.
- ☒ People do not have food. More pathetic is that if one can even earn some food s/he does not have any guarantee whether s/he would be able to cook it. Because people are suffering from acute fire wood crisis.
- ☒ Scarcity of fodder is very common in the entire region, which has drastically reduced the number of livestock and poultry. This ultimately leads to the reduction of protein sources.
- ☒ In the stressed period the hardcore poor usually take undomesticated food. But due to the continuous water logging they have lost these sources of their food.

In search of the real causes of waterlogging

Every people have inalienable right to live better. But these are deprived of their right. As stated by the affected people and experts the principal reasons of these miseries are: construction of embankment by donors in wrong design without grasping the special geo-physical characteristics of the region; Construction of Farakka embankment by India ignoring the consequence of the downstream Bangladesh; illegal or ill-designed constructions over the rivers

and canals, dying of rivers etc. This has been further exacerbated by corruption of project implementing authorities, political leadership, narrow political gaining, and shrimp cultivation and so on.

The wounding design and wounding wellbeing

The Southwest Coastal Region of Bangladesh, located at the mouth of the largest delta in the world is endowed with unique environmental nature, fertile land and other natural resources. This tidal wetland is comprised of rivers, estuaries, the largest mangrove forest (Sundarbans) in the world and brackish water regime. This region is barely one meter above mean sea level.

Due to its physical geography, this delta of loose soil is formed by alluvial deposits brought down by the numerous distributaries of the Ganges. Though these rivers lost their connection with the upstream rivers, yet they survive as carriers of surplus rain water. They are also inter-connected with each other. Their flows are governed by the tidal flow coming up from the Bay of Bengal and the seasonal monsoon rains.



Bengal Delta

They carry large quantities of floating sediments mixed with the decomposed forest detritus. The 3.5 million tons of forest detritus dropped from the Sundarbans, decomposing in the water, produces enormous quantities of nutritious organic food for all kinds of aquatic life. Due this special nature of soil this is one of the most productive agricultural regions in the world. But Crop failure due to saline water inundation and monsoon flooding was common in southwest region.

After the devastating flood of 1954-55 an international mission (Crook Mission) was sent under the initiative of United Nations to solve the flood problem of the then East Bengal (Present Bangladesh). Mission prepared Recommendations but due to World War II, it was suspended. After the war, world experienced a new world order. The chemistry of relationship had changed.

The responsibility of water resource management and solving the flooding problem had been placed to Water and Power Development Authority (WAPDA). This new era of water management brought new era of interests.

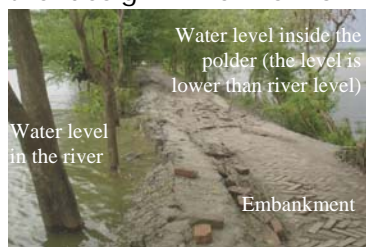
The seed that bred the pains and tears:

Coastal Embankment Project (CEP): As claimed by the proponents of Green Revolution (!) that to feed the steadily increasing population introduction of High Yielding Variety (HYV) was panacea for many populous nations like Bangladesh. Motivated by this slogan the then East Pakistan Government in the 1959 decided to bring the southwest



Bhabadaha Sluice Gate:
Entrance point for people's pain

region under cultivation through implementation of the Coastal Embankment Project (CEP), enclosing all the tidal influenced Coastal areas within 90 polders. Of these 39 polders (10, 14,100 acres) are in the Khulna-Jessore region, enclosed within 1566 km of embankments with 282 sluice gates. 21 vent Bhabadaha Sluice Gate- one of the important structure of the design which is now the source of



Difference of water level between the river and inside the polder

the pains for millions people. The embankments denied the entry of the tides into the polders. As a result, the heavy loads of silt carried by the tides settled on the riverbeds, which gradually rose above the level of the lands within the polders and closed the exits of the sluice gates. Simultaneously, within the polders had continued to subside, without the compensating silt deposits, which used to maintain the balance.

While implementing the CEP some of local personalities like engineer Kamol Babu of Bhabadaha, Dr. Moslem of Holpur, peasant leader of Dumuria Mr. Bishnu Chattergi and Dr. Abdur Rahim of Arhanghata registered their protest against the project for wrong design. The USAID funded the CEP has dramatically increased the rice production in the region. Farmers were able to harvest two or even three bumper crops per year. But nature's reaction against the intervention was already building up. Within 15 years of the construction of embankments siltation started at the water entrance point of the sluice gates and rivers and canals' bed height began to increase. As a result, first Beel* Dakatia under polder 25 became water logged. Consequently, polder 24, 27 & 28 also became water logged one after another. The temporary drainage congestion, which first appeared in 1982, gradually became permanent water logging to such an extent that, by 1990, an area of 100, 600 hectares in Khulna and Jessore districts alone was permanently waterlogged.

In the mean time the flood tolerant and salinity tolerate rice varieties have mostly lost from the farmers' field. After 4 years of silence, government appeal to Asian Development Bank (ADB) to fund for the solution of Water logging in the southwest region.

ADB's Entrance in scene and new dimension of water logging: KCERP to KJDRP Project

To solve waterlogging problem, Khulna Coastal Embankment Rehabilitation Project-1 (KCERP-1) was first approved for Beet Dakatia. The project aimed at rehabilitating about 78,793 acres of land under Dumuria, Phultala and Batiaghata upazilas of Khulna district. But the people within the project area rejected the plan and the donor agency also found the technical aspects of project faulty. As a result, the project was withdrawn after a year. Later a new draft plan, Coastal Embankment Rehabilitation Project -2 (CERP-2) was prepared that also included polder No. 24 of Beel Dakatia area within its design. These project funded by ADB was implemented between 1986 and 1993

* Sunken land between the high banks of two rivers, or caused by subsidence due to decomposition of underground organic matter

with a loan of \$ 16.9 million (Loan 819-BAN)

Whether Donors' assisted Projects are for problem solution or creation?

Although it is claimed that the CEP and the KCERP saved 400,000 hectares of agricultural land from salt water intrusion caused by daily tide flows and drainage congestion during monsoons, a report of the ADB has in clear terms admitted that both the CEP and the KCERP caused catastrophic drainage congestion in different areas of Khulna and Jessore due to silting in the river channels and outside the polders, and along the sluice gates

Since 17th century, Zamindars/landlords temporarily constructed low dikes for 6-8 months and wooden sluice gates around the area to protect the arable land from above hazards. In the rainy season, farmers exchanged saline water of their fields with river water when it became almost sweet. Sweet water normally washed away the salinity from the land. Thus they got good harvest of paddy as well as varieties of fish. Due to this traditional practice, there was a balance between sedimentation and subsidence of the area. Thus, the environment, ecosystem and bio-system evolved in the coastal area were in equilibrium. The dikes made by local traditional technology were not sufficiently high and strong. Opening of sluice gates were not enough and gates were weak. These were temporary structures and need to repair every year. But these were effective in terms of water management. After abolition of Zamindari system, the maintenance of these structures became disrupted. Based on farmers' traditional knowledge when the first rain of the monsoon they used to build low earthen dikes to prevent the incursion of the tides, and similar temporary wooden sluices to drain off surplus rainwater. Community leader, on behalf of the community ensure the proper management of the temporary dikes. These community leaders are called 'Sardar', 'Sana', 'Dhali', or 'Mondol'. The owners of land provide labour for dikes construction and management participation on the basis of amount of land they own. This indigenous system of water

management was known as Tidal River Management (TRM) in that time they cultivated numerous varieties flood tolerant and salinity tolerant rice.

All these projects were undertaken ignoring the local scientific knowledge and traditional wisdom. Even they did not consider the nature of region also and prepared 'every where fit' design. Due to the wrong design, water logging in the Southwest Coastal Zones and suffering became permanent as well. Affected people became Frustrated and started movement.

People's movement and broken barriers

Finding no other alternatives, the waterlogged people went for movement and formed committees at various levels and identified the true cause of the problem. They therefore decided to



People are cutting the earth to widen the Rail & Dhaka-Khulna high way on self-labour

reintroduce tidal flow into polder No. 25 in Beel Dakatia. Accordingly, in September 1990, they breached the polder at four locations. Beel Dakatia was again connected with the river Hamkura. Through regular tidal actions and the accumulation of alluvium, the land formation process of the beel resumed. In two years from 1990-92, 2500 acres of new char land emerged. The logic, which worked behind direct intervention by the local people, was based on their experience through generations and popular wisdom. The popular wisdom was reflected in the fact that the resumption of tidal action restored the balance that was lost when the supply of alluvium was cut off from the beel by the polder. The success in draining out water of Beel Dakatia encouraged people of adjacent waterlogged areas. Mhadhukhalir beel and Patra beel are another two examples of such collective efforts. However, these efforts could not achieve desired results at every stage because of a lack of proper organizational structure and planning.

People's Movement and Aftermath

In response to the people's movement Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) planned to initiate a new project.

Again BWDB without taking any lesson from the performance of the previous projects and without local people's consultation have designed Khulna Jessore Drainage Rehabilitation Project (KJDRP) in collaboration with ADB (loan no. 1289-BAN (SF) in 1993-1994 with a estimated cost of 62 million US\$ (Tk.229.5 crore) which was the largest project of its kind taken so far.

Again KJDRP design had ignored the special geo-characteristics of the region. The main thrust of the project was to prevent tidal water from entering the project area and to confine the alluvium outside the project area. The navigability of a few selected rivers was expected to be maintained, allowing smaller rivers to silt up and die. The plans aimed to keep water levels outside the main proposed regulators during the ebb tides lower than that of the waterlogged polders. In effect, this has overlooked the interconnected

nature of the rivers and ignored the overall drainage system that the rivers have built up through an intricate network. The ecological features of the project area had not been considered. The aquatic life cycles had been neglected and organic production and biodiversity have been ignored. The Project area

changed into a one-way sweet water eco-zone from the earlier brackish tidal flow region. The whole area thus turned into a controlled, drained off area. The land subsidence has not been compensated. The whole KJDRP activities are featured by unbound limitations. The NGOs took up the people's alternative proposal of TRM on the basis of experience gained from Beel Dakatia and other similar popular activities. The combined power of mass movement,

media campaign and NGOs advocacy finally moved ADB to send a fact-finding team to the concerned area in 1999. As a result, BWDB continued to change the Plans. ADB visited the area and became convince of the viability of the TRM approach. Accordingly ADB advised BWDB to redesign the project on the basis of TRM concept. The redesigned plan, which was implemented, was not fully in accordance with the TRM concept. But BWDB spent only 40 million taka (Bangladeshi currency) and remaining money is spent on other purpose like construction of ill-planned embankments, sluice gate and cross-dam. Local people complained that in the name of construction most money was plundered by the BDBD's personnel and other interest groups (e.g. political leadership & influential people).

•ADB & BWDB tried to implement TRM approach in their own way not by the local wisdom and traditional knowledge. To serve

for the *Gher* (Shrimp farm) owners, they selected wrong site for TRM. Result is obvious destructive.

Thousand hectares of land was inundated. It needs to be mentioned that in the stagnant water inside the polder the influential *Gher* owners make shrimp farm. They

need continuous stagnant water. The ill-planned regulators of this project make the upper-stream river canals. As a result, the down-stream flow of water decreased and created water congestion due to sedimentation.

• KJDRP is featured by inadequate feasibility study. Huskonin, Halcrow and BWDB failed to pin point the main causes of water logging and provide appropriate solution. Even they could not select the project command area accurately. So, the command area of the drainage proposals

Box 1: Khulna-Jessore Drainage Rehabilitation Project

Location: Manirampur, Keshappur & Abhoynagar upazila of Jessore district and Dumuria & Phultala upazila of Khulna district

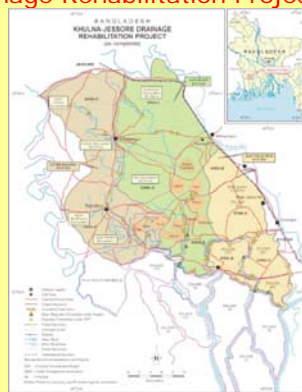
Area: 100,600 hectares

Implementing Agencies: Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB); Department of Agriculture Extension (DAE); Department of Fisheries (DoF)

Funding Agency: Asian Development Bank

Implementation time: November, 1995 – 2006 (as per revised plan)

Objectives: Environmental improvement, poverty reduction by reducing drainage congestion and increased agricultural production and creation of on-farm employment through Tidal River Management (TRM)



KJDRP Project Area

changed frequently. KJDRP brings no hope for the people of adjacent areas of

Box 2: Changing command area in different proposals

Husloning Plan	- 1006 sq.km
Halcrow Plan	- 1306 sq.km
BWDB Plan	- 1306 sq.km
KJDRP-1	- 1006 sq.km
KJDRP-2	- 1126 sq.km

Beel
 Khuksia
 Bharatbha
 ina beel,
 Panjia,
 Pathra and
 Burulia
 beels,
 Beel

Godalia and Teku & Balashali beel rather it made their life miserable through permanent waterlogging.

- For KJDRP implementation four component organization were involved: **A.** Mobilizing Beneficiary Participation (BWDB); **B.** Rehabilitation Civil Works (BWDB); **C.** Agriculture Development (DAE); **D.** Fisheries Management (DoF). There was lack of coordination among these 4 components.

- In KJDRP there was an effort to ensure Beneficiary participation. For doing so BWDB formed Water Management Association (WMA) and Water Management Federation (WMF). In initial phase these bodies were manned by local union council chairmen, members and influential people. Now these are dominated by different interest groups associated with the corruption practice of BWDB. It is completely a failed case of people's participation in water resource management.

Other factors responsible for waterlogging

Along with the said factors causing water logging of this Coastal region was further deteriorated another two man made factors that are:

Decrease of upland flow: In the region, the Matabhanga and Gorai rivers are the main distributaries of the Padma River. About 160 years ago Matabhanga River began to silt up at its mouth and now completely silted. Due to this heavy siltation its distributaries (Kumar, Chitra, Bhairab, Kabadak, Nabagonga etc.) are not getting water from upstream. Similarly Gorai River's mouth also silted up approximately 140-150 years ago. Later on the construction of Gorai Railway Bridge near Kustia city, the rate of siltation accelerated. Now, virtually,

this river is getting no water in the dry season (January-June).

Farraka Barrage

The construction of Farakka Barrage on the Ganges River caused a sudden decrease of flow in its downstream (Padma River and its distributaries). As evidence form popular newspaper article, local people's opinion and development workers' view after withdrawal of the Ganges water by Farakka Barrage in 1976, the rate of siltation on rivers' beds increased unprecedented, especially in the Ganges tidal plain.

III-planned construction

Most of the roads are in the region are east-west direction whereas the regional slop and the drainage directions are in the north-south direction. These east-west roads are obstructing the natural drainage and are enhancing drainage problem.

Apathy of government and local administration

While visiting the water logged areas on 25 August 2006 in Jessore at Mahakal (Abhaynagar Upazila) we saw both railway culvert (No. 162) and Dhaka-Khulna Highway culvert was constructed in a manner that were obstructing the natural drainage from 52 beels (e.g. Beel Kedaria; Beel Bakar etc.) and 27 beels (e.g. Beel Khukshia; Beel Bhaina etc.). Many times affected people tried to make understand the concerned authority about the situation but failed. So they opted for movement and finally affected people have taken initiatives to widen the size of the culverts and channel leading to Bhairab River on their voluntary labour by cutting highway and Railway Bridge.

Mismanagement by BWDB

Mismanagement of sluice gates and wilful misuses of land and water by the influential people are also important causes of water logging. For example, each tidal channel has its own catchments area and if anyone closes it for aquaculture (basically shrimp culture), it will cause inundation to its upstream. This is way; in many polders there is conflict of shrimp farming and paddy cultivation, which causes water logging in many cases.

Interest nexus: Barricade to the solution

The people of the affected areas believe that the interest nexus especially the officials of BWDB, political leadership are

the barrier to solve the waterlogging problem. Shanjoya Chakraborti, a 42 years Hindu priest of Kultia union with grievances said, "We don't believe BWDB at all. They are the main culprits. Shrimp Gher owners are another main barriers to permanent solution of the problem. They do not want to solve the problem, rather they want to keep it alive permanently, because if they can do it they will get projects and will have scope to earn money. Besides, donors also work in favour of the BWDB, because they are engaging consultants. Political leadership runs after to get contract or to earn money from different sources. The owner of the shrimp gher needs stagnant water for shrimp farming. This is a huge profitable business. Definitely they will try to keep this situation to be prolonged. Even we do not believe the NGOs. They take the photos of our distress situation and make it as capital to get donors' fund. If the problem is solved how will they earn money?" Most of the affected people echoed same believe.

Both national and local politicians do not want to solve the problem. They always count their future votes. If someone solves the problem other party thinks they should not give the opportunity to be popular. Besides, most of the affected people of Manirampur and Abhaynagar (nearly 60-70%) are Hindu. Some of these minority people believe that their religious identity is also a barrier to solve the problem. Some people want these Hindu families to migrate to India, which will help them in election.

Affected people cannot go against Gher owners and political leadership and if they (people) do so then they will be harassed by false cases. Local administration is also run on their advice. More pathetic is that often district administration lease out land for gher to the influential peoples. Many times it gave birth to terrorist activities, which had taken precious lives in many occasions.

In KJDRP, ADB through BWDB tried to infuse people's participation in water management. As Water management Organization (WMOs') members are

selected by BWDB, so they always work in favour of BWDB and try to earn some money. The so-called community participation in the water management is furze to the people. Explaining the WMOs, one of the affected people of Bhabadaha area said, "Once Aboni Mondol, the presently secretary of WMA had no money, but now he is a rich man of the locality. It became possible to the joint corruption of BWDB and WMOs.

Peoples Desire

People do not want relief, do not want special facilities from any body or do not want to have part from corruption nor do they want political power. They only want to survive. They have the constitutional right to get rid of from this man-made catastrophe. There emerged many people movements for sustainable solution of the problem. BLAST and BELA already filed writ petition to honourable High court Division for providing compensation to the affected people. Now the people's demands are:

- Implementation of TRM concept in line with the traditional wisdom and local scientific knowledge
- To ensure true peoples participation in project designing and implementation. Well-planned public communication campaign should be conducted at planning, implementation and operation & maintenance phases to create public awareness and participation. In the planning phase the campaign should highlight the followings
- To ensure transparency in all activities.
- To involve Engineering Corps of Defence Services in aid of civil power for project implementation
- Implementing agencies should provide following information
 - Information on the proposed technical options/solution of the projects
 - Information on all aspects of the component activities
 - Immediate and long term impact of the projects
 - Positive and negative aspects of the projects
 - Viability of the projects overtime in the medium and long term
 - Schedules for the project implementation

- Information on maintenance and operation
- For immediate relieve the dredging of Hari River from Kharnia to Bayarghata
- Bad-designed culverts and bridge should be replace appropriate structures/design
- Large-scale relief and medical service to the affected people
- Affected people should be compensated by implementation agency (BWDB) and donors (USAID and ADB)
- For education the students need to get subsidy in all educational purposes
- Government has to provide alternative livelihood supports (e.g. financial support (of course without interest) to cultivation Mele (one type of long grass) for weaving pati (local mat) etc.
- Immediate support for drinking water and latrine.
- Compensation for landowners for TRM projects.

Respects for people's knowledge and well-being

Affected people are trying to solve the environment and ecology friendly sustainable solution of the problem through their own local wisdom and traditional knowledge. People believe, so far implemented all projects were undertaken ignoring the traditional knowledge and local ecology. These were undertaken not for the people's interest rather for the sake of donors and unbridled corruption of implementing agencies. All of these projects failed to bring any well-being for the people rather these increased people's sufferings. ADB admitted in a report that the USAID funded Coastal Embankment Project (CEP) of 1960s and ADB funded Coastal Embankment Rehabilitation Project (CERP) of 1980s have created water logging in the southwest region. So, the loan liability must not be vested on people. It is the donors and the implementing agencies have to be held responsible. People want immediate relief from this man-made

disaster otherwise they will be bound to find their own way of solution. One affected people said: "We do not believe BWDB and NGOs. They are all thieves. BWDB has created today's situation by their own hands. If they come with similar project to fill up their own pockets with donors' money, we will simply kill them. We have nothing to loss but to survive." We need to respect this sentiment otherwise any untoward incident may take place which is not rare if we look through history.

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The hardcopy of its Bengali language version is available at Innovators Office. For other documents please visit www.unnayan.org. Most of the documents are downloadable.

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