



Navigating the Abyss: An In-depth Exploration of Educational Challenges in Riverine Char Areas – A Case Study of Char Kabilpur, Gaibandha

¹ Md. Ahasun Habib

¹ PhD Researcher, Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP), Dhaka. Email: dahaub@gmail.com.

Abstract: This study focuses into the poignant narrative of riverine Char communities, exemplified by the case of Mr. Abdus Salam, a 40-year-old farmer residing in Guptamani village, Fazlupur union, Fulchhari Upazila, Gaibandha district. River erosion, a relentless force, has wrought havoc on their lives, resulting in the loss of homes, livelihoods, and assets. This study highlights the profound impact of river erosion on education, focusing on the struggles faced by families like Mr. Salam's. Amidst these challenges, their 6-year-old son, Md. Rakibul Hasan, a Class-I student, grapples with obstacles in regular school attendance. The research unravels the reasons behind irregular attendance, the absence of stipends, and the dearth of support initiatives for struggling students in Char areas. By exploring the heart of Char Kabilpur, it underscores the pressing need for interventions such as monthly scholarships and financial grants. The narrative calls for attention to the scarcity of resources and urges stakeholders to take action, ensuring a brighter educational future for Char's children.

Keywords: Riverine char areas, river erosion, educational challenges, livelihoods, school attendance, financial support, scholarships, stakeholder action

1. INTRODUCTION

In the labyrinthine landscapes of riverine Char areas, where the relentless forces of nature dictate the rhythms of life, lies an enthralling yet poignant narrative. This narrative revolves around the lives of individuals like Mr. Abdus Salam, a 40-year-old farmer residing in Guptamani village, Fazlupur union, Fulchhari Upazila, Gaibandha district, Bangladesh. Char areas, characterized by their precarious existence on the shifting banks of rivers, confront a formidable adversary i.e., river erosion. This research embarks on a profound exploration of the educational challenges faced by communities living in these volatile riverine Char areas, with a particular focus on the case study of Char Kabilpur.

The term "Char" refers to the riverine islands formed and shaped by the relentless currents of the rivers (Hira et al, 2023). These islands are often vulnerable to the erosive forces of the rivers, which can lead to the sudden disappearance of homes, farmlands, and livelihoods. It is within this context that we delve into the lives of individuals like Mr. Abdus Salam and his family, who have borne witness to the transformative and, at times, devastating power of the river.

River erosion, a recurring natural disaster, has left an indelible mark on the lives of Char residents. The lush fields that once sustained families like the Salams have been devoured by the river, rendering their homes precarious and their livelihoods uncertain. As a consequence, Mr. Salam, who possesses no formal educational qualifications and relies on farming for sustenance, now navigates life's challenges with a monthly income of Tk. 5,000.00 (five thousand).

This study is emblematic of the broader challenges faced by Char communities across the region. It echoes the voices of those grappling with the loss of their land, assets, and sense of security due to river erosion. However, the impact of river erosion transcends the material realm; it extends its reach into the domain of education, affecting the futures of young students like Md. Rakibul Hasan, Mr. Salam's 6-year-old son and a Class-I student at Char Kabilpur Govt. Primary School.

Rakibul's educational journey is fraught with obstacles. Transportation to school involves treacherous river crossings and impassable roads during the monsoon, hindering his regular attendance. His mother, Ms. Tashia Begum, narrates the challenges faced by the community during months of flooding and erosion. The

absence of stipends and support initiatives exacerbates the difficulties faced by struggling students in Char areas, leaving them adrift in the turbulent waters of education.

As the study delves into the heart of Char Kabilpur and similar riverine Char areas, this research seeks to unravel the underlying causes of irregular school attendance, the absence of financial support, and the dearth of initiatives for students facing these challenges. It aims to shine a light on the pressing need for interventions such as monthly scholarships and financial grants. Through this exploration, the narrative unfolds, urging stakeholders to consider the scarcity of resources and take decisive action to ensure a brighter educational future for the children of Char.

In the sections that follow, the study has navigated the abyss of educational challenges in riverine Char areas, exploring the multifaceted dimensions of this issue and proposing tangible solutions to empower communities like the Salams. This research is not merely an academic endeavor; it is a call to action, a testament to resilience, and a pledge to secure the educational rights of Char's children against the relentless tides of adversity.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The riverine Char areas of Bangladesh, exemplified by the case study of Char Kabilpur, Gaibandha, are confronted with a formidable and recurring challenge: river erosion. Inhabiting these volatile landscapes, communities like that of Mr. Abdus Salam, a 40-year-old farmer in Guptamani village, Fazlupur union, Fulchhari Upazila, Gaibandha district, grapple with the profound impact of this natural disaster. The erosion of riverbanks not only threatens homes, farmlands, and livelihoods but also casts a long shadow over the educational prospects of young students like Mr. Salam's 6-year-old son, Md. Rakibul Hasan, a Class-I student at Char Kabilpur Govt. Primary School.

The problem at hand encompasses several interconnected facets:

1. River erosion robs Char residents of their farmlands and livelihoods, leaving them economically vulnerable. For individuals like Mr. Abdus Salam, who relies on farming to support his family, the loss of agricultural assets translates into financial instability and hardship.
2. The adverse impact of river erosion extends to education, particularly affecting students like Md. Rakibul Hasan. The treacherous river crossings and waterlogged roads during the monsoon disrupt regular school attendance, hindering the educational progress of these young learners.
3. Char communities, already facing economic challenges, do not benefit from stipends or financial support for students. This absence of financial aid exacerbates the difficulties faced by families in meeting the educational expenses of their children, further jeopardizing the students' access to quality education.
4. The education system in Char areas lacks specialized support mechanisms for struggling students. The absence of extra classes, separate teaching for weak students, or provisions for disabled students hampers the overall quality of education, leaving students ill-equipped to face academic challenges.
5. The community perceives a lack of engagement and action by school authorities and local authorities in addressing the unique challenges faced by Char students and families. This perceived neglect further exacerbates the feelings of isolation and marginalization.

In light of these pressing issues, there is an urgent need to address the multifaceted challenges posed by river erosion in Char areas. It is imperative to develop comprehensive solutions that encompass livelihood security, transportation infrastructure, financial aid, and educational support. This research endeavors to unravel the underlying causes and consequences of these challenges while advocating for tangible interventions that can pave the way for a brighter educational future for the children of Char and similar riverine communities.

3. OBJECTIVE OF RESEARCH

This study aimed to uncover the reasons behind irregular school attendance among children in riverine Char areas, particularly during adverse weather conditions. The study explored the lack of stipends or financial incentives for students in Char Kabilpur, Gaibandha, and assessed its impact on their educational participation. This research sought to evaluate the existing educational support initiatives and their effectiveness in addressing the challenges faced by students like Md. Rakibul Hasan. Based on the findings, this study advocated for interventions such as monthly scholarships and financial grants to mitigate educational challenges and ensure a brighter future for the children of Char areas.

4. METHODS

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the educational challenges in riverine Char areas, qualitative interviews were conducted. Mr. Abdus Salam, aged about 40 years, and Ms. Tashia Begum, aged 35 years,

were the primary participants. These interviews provided valuable insights into their personal experiences and struggles due to river erosion and educational difficulties (Sena, B. 2023, James, D. 2023). The researcher engaged in participant observation to gather firsthand information about the living conditions and challenges faced by the Salam family and the community in Guptamani village, Fazlupur union, Fulchhari Upazila, Gaibandha district. This method allowed for a deeper understanding of the day-to-day life and hardships they encounter.

5. RAKIBUL'S RIVERINE PATH TO EDUCATION

In the remote riverine Char area of Char Kabilpur, Gaibandha, a determined and resilient young boy named Md. Rakibul Hasan embarks on a challenging journey towards education. His path is unique, as it is characterized by the formidable obstacles posed by the region's geographic and environmental realities.

Char Kabilpur is situated on the shifting banks of the Jamuna River, a major river in Bangladesh. This region is prone to river erosion, a natural phenomenon that poses a constant threat to the stability and existence of homes, farmlands, and communities. The Char, or riverine island, is often isolated from the mainland, creating logistical challenges for its inhabitants.

Rakibul, a bright 6-year-old boy, is the son of Mr. Abdus Salam and Ms. Tashia Begum. His father, Mr. Salam, is a 40-year-old farmer with no formal educational qualifications. The family relies on farming for their livelihood, earning a modest monthly income of Tk. 5,000.00. Their lives have been marked by the loss of their land and assets to the relentless river, leaving them with a tin shed house and limited resources.

Rakibul's eagerness to learn and pursue education faces formidable challenges due to the unique characteristics of the Char area: a) To reach Char Kabilpur Govt. Primary School, Rakibul must navigate treacherous river crossings by boat. During the monsoon season, the roads become waterlogged, further complicating his journey to school. b) Rakibul is not awarded any stipend by the school, which means his family bears the full cost of his education, including uniforms and study materials. c) River erosion and flooding often force the school to close for extended periods, depriving students like Rakibul of regular education. Alternative educational options are limited. d) The education system in Char areas lacks specialized support for students who face academic challenges. There are no provisions for extra classes, separate teaching for weak students, or facilities for disabled students.

Despite these obstacles, Rakibul's determination shines through. He is keenly interested in attending school and pursuing knowledge. His parents, Mr. Salam and Ms. Tashia Begum, support his educational aspirations and, whenever possible, accompany him to school.

Rakibul's story serves as an embodiment of resilience in the face of adversity. His riverine path to education is a testament to the indomitable human spirit and the unwavering commitment to learning, even when the odds seem insurmountable. His journey represents the broader challenges faced by students in riverine Char areas, highlighting the urgent need for interventions and support to ensure a brighter educational future for children like Rakibul.

6. KEY FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The study reveals that river erosion is the predominant challenge faced by the people of Char Kabilpur, Gaibandha. It results in the loss of homes, farmland, furniture, and other essential assets, forcing families like Mr. Abdus Salam's into tin shed houses.
2. Mr. Abdus Salam, the head of the household, earns a meager monthly income of Tk. 5,000.00 through farming. This income is insufficient to meet their needs, and the family lives in food shortage and crisis for approximately nine months of the year.
3. The transportation infrastructure for students like Md. Rakibul Hasan is severely lacking. The need to cross the river by boat to reach school, coupled with waterlogging during the monsoon, hinders regular school attendance.
4. The study found that Char Kabilpur Govt. Primary School does not provide stipends to students, further discouraging regular attendance and hindering access to education.
5. Riverbank erosion and flooding often lead to the closure of schools for extended periods, depriving students of education. Alternative education systems are scarce, leaving families without educational support.
5. The research highlights the absence of special initiatives within the school system, such as extra classes, separate teaching for weaker students, or provisions for disabled students. This lack of support affects the overall quality of education.

6. The study reveals that school teachers and local authorities do not take adequate measures to address the challenges faced by students in Char areas. This apathy further hampers the quality of education.

7. The findings suggest a critical need for interventions such as monthly scholarships and financial grants to ensure regular attendance and improve the educational prospects of students in Char areas.

In summary, this research sheds light on the harsh realities of educational challenges in riverine Char areas, emphasizing the urgent need for interventions to address irregular attendance, lack of stipends, transportation difficulties, and overall educational support for students like Md. Rakibul Hasan and families like the Salams in Char Kabilpur, Gaibandha.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Address the transportation challenges faced by students like Md. Rakibul Hasan by investing in improved and reliable means of getting to school, especially during the monsoon season. This could include the construction of safer roads and the provision of boats for river crossings.

2. Establish a system of monthly scholarships for students in Char areas, such as Char Kabilpur, to incentivize regular school attendance. These scholarships can help families offset the costs associated with education and encourage consistent enrollment.

3. Introduce stipends for students attending Char Kabilpur Govt. Primary School and similar institutions. Stipends can act as a financial support mechanism for families struggling to meet basic needs and educational expenses.

4. Develop alternative education programs during periods of riverbank erosion and flooding. These programs should ensure that students continue to receive an education, even when physical schools are closed for extended periods.

5. Implement specialized support initiatives within schools, including extra classes, separate instruction for weaker students, and provisions for disabled students. These measures can enhance the quality of education and cater to the diverse needs of students in Char areas.

6. Advocate for changes in educational policies at the local and national levels to address the unique challenges faced by Char communities. Engage with policymakers to raise awareness of the urgent need for improved educational support.

7. Promote community engagement and involvement in education-related decision-making processes. Encourage parents and community members to actively participate in discussions and initiatives aimed at enhancing the educational environment.

8. Launch awareness campaigns to inform Char residents about the available educational support programs, scholarships, and grants. Ensure that families are aware of the opportunities and benefits for their children's education.

9. Expand access to solar electricity connections in Char areas, similar to the initiative undertaken by the Salam family. Reliable electricity can facilitate better access to information technology and e-learning resources.

10. Develop and implement disaster preparedness plans that include education continuity measures. Ensure that schools are equipped to handle emergencies such as riverbank erosion and flooding without extended disruptions.

Incorporating these suggestions into the educational framework of Char Kabilpur and other riverine Char areas can help alleviate the educational challenges faced by families like the Salams. By addressing transportation issues, providing financial support, and enhancing the overall quality of education, these recommendations aim to ensure a brighter future for the children of Char and empower them to overcome the obstacles posed by river erosion.

8. CONCLUSION

The study, titled "Navigating the Abyss" has shed light on the profound educational challenges faced by communities living in riverine Char areas, with a specific focus on the case of Mr. Abdus Salam and his family in Char Kabilpur, Gaibandha. The findings of this research illuminate the dire circumstances and obstacles encountered by families in Char areas, stemming primarily from the relentless force of river erosion.

River erosion has proven to be a devastating and recurring catastrophe for Char communities, resulting in the loss of homes, livelihoods, and assets. It has forced families like the Salams into tin shed houses, exacerbating their economic hardships. The lack of formal education and limited income opportunities further compound the challenges they face.

Education, a fundamental right for every child, is marred by transportation difficulties, irregular school attendance, and the absence of stipends. River crossings by boat and waterlogged roads during the monsoon disrupt students' access to education. Moreover, the closure of schools during riverbank erosion and flooding deprives students of learning opportunities for extended periods.

The absence of specialized support mechanisms within the education system, such as extra classes and provisions for struggling or disabled students, diminishes the quality of education. This, coupled with a perceived lack of engagement and action by school teachers and local authorities, further disheartens parents like Ms. Tashia Begum.

In response to these challenges, several key suggestions have emerged from the study:

- a. Address transportation difficulties by investing in safer and reliable means of getting to school.
- b. Introduce monthly scholarships to incentivize regular school attendance.
- c. Provide stipends to support families in meeting educational expenses.
- d. Develop alternative education programs during periods of school closure due to riverbank erosion and flooding.
- e. Implement specialized support initiatives within schools to enhance the quality of education.
- f. Advocate for changes in educational policies to address the unique challenges faced by Char communities.
- g. Promote community engagement in education-related decision-making processes.
- h. Launch awareness campaigns to inform Char residents about available educational support programs.
- i. Expand access to solar electricity connections to facilitate better access to educational resources.
- j. Develop and implement disaster preparedness plans that include education continuity measures.

These recommendations aim to improve the educational prospects of students like Md. Rakibul Hasan and families like the Salams in Char Kabilpur. By addressing the root causes of educational challenges, enhancing access to education, and advocating for policy changes, there is a concerted effort towards a brighter future for the children of Char, mitigating the impact of river erosion and ensuring their right to education. In this endeavor, a contribution is made to a more equitable and inclusive society where all children have the opportunity to thrive, regardless of their geographic location or the challenges they face.

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