

Hilsa and Fishermen Community in the Meghna and Tentulia Estuaries

COAST ENDEAVOR FOR SUSTAINABLE HILSA RESOURCES AND FISHERMEN COMMUNITY LIVELIHOODS

Role of Hilsa in Bangladesh Economy:

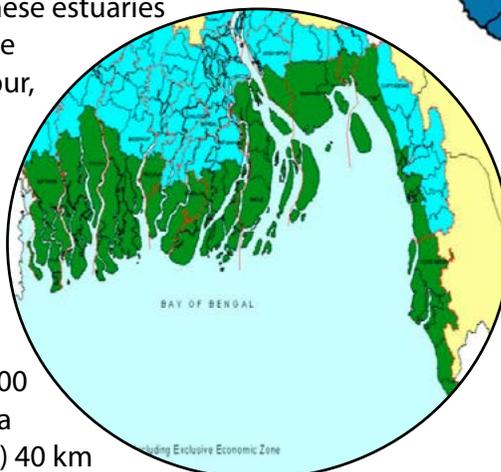
The fish and fisheries are playing a significant role for the socio-economic development of Bangladesh. This sector contributes 3% of total export earning, 4.37% to GDP and 23.37% to agriculture sector. In 2013-2014 the annual fish production was 3.548 million metric ton (MT) where hilsa (*Tenualosailisha*) production was 0.351 million MT and that contributes 11% of total fish production and 1% of national GDP in the country (Sharker et al, Fish Aqua J 2016, 7.2). Among the fish, the national fish hilsa has made its place into the Bengali culture and it is highly nutritious and delicious. Hilsa is in



plenty in the Ganges/Meghna rivers and other 100 rivers in Bangladesh. About 0.45 million people are involved directly with hilsa fishing and 2-2.5 million people are involved in the supply chain from transportation, marketing, processing to other post-harvest activities (Halder and Ali 2014).

Meghna and Tentulia Estuaries:

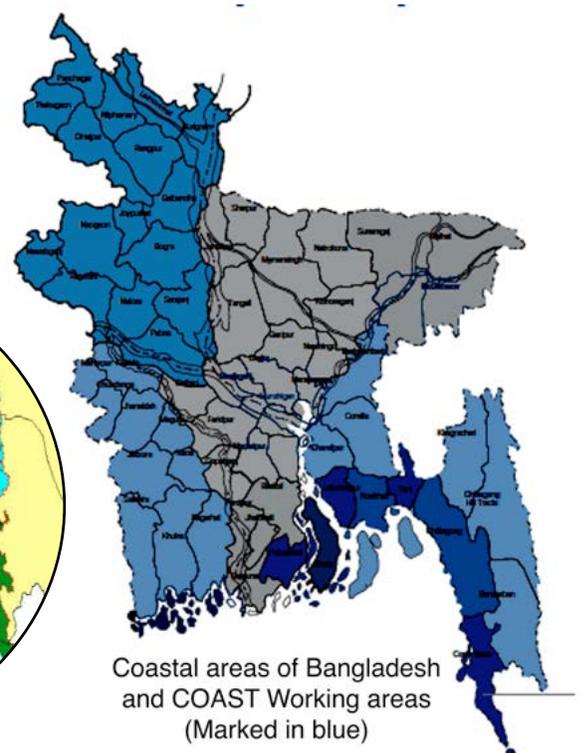
The Meghna and Tentulia estuaries are the breeding zones for the hilsa fish. These estuaries cover the five places in the districts of Bhola, Chandpur, Laxmipur, Barisal, Patuakhali, Barguna, Jhalakathi, Pirojpur and Shariatpur have been declared as sanctuary areas as well. The areas are in lower Meghna 190 km, in the Tentulia river 100 km, in Andarmanik river (a river in Patuakhali district) 40 km



and at the Padma 20 km. The total areas of this estuary is 250 thousand hectares (WorldFish). To preserve the juvenile and brood hilsa fish, the government declared the ban period for fishing in these sanctuaries during March-April and October-November.

Fishers livelihoods in the estuaries:

The people of these areas are dependent on the fishing from the open water sources. The coastal fishing activities have been hampered due to frequent cyclone signals. Such disasters make them more vulnerable and hits their major livelihoods. Due to climate change, the extensive river floods cause major disruption and damage of their assets. River and sea erosions induce them to be forced migrants in the slum areas in the cities where they are leading miserable lives. The scarcity of land in the shore area also creates social



problems among the fishing community. Most of the fishers are living on the others' land or in the embankments.

COAST endeavor for the fishers in the estuaries:

COAST (www.coastbd.net) Trust is working in the coastal areas of Bangladesh. The working areas cover seven coastal districts and 35 upazillas (sub-districts) in the Bangladesh coast including the small sand bar islands in the Bay of Bengal like Dhalchar, Char Patila, Char Kukrimukri, Char Nizam, Char Motahar, Char Kalatoli, Monpura and Char Zahiruddin. To address the causes of the declining of hilsa population and to create alternative livelihood options for fishers in the estuaries, COAST has



been integrating its core programs with the fishers since 1997. It is raising the awareness among fishers regarding the importance of hilsa conservation through court yard meetings and

Creating Awareness Among Fishers through Radio Meghna-99.0 fm

The Radio Meghna (www.radiomeghna.net) is a voice of the coastal people. As a people centered organization working with the Rights Based Approach, COAST wants to use Radio Meghna for the marginalized people of the coastal areas. It has been established in 2015 in Charfession upazilla under Bhola district; south central coast and covers a radius of 17 km, it will be increased gradually with the government permission. It is completely run by a group of poor and adolescent girls from the locality. From the very beginning of its journey, it is raising awareness among fisher-folks. The radio program emphasizes on fisheries rules, sanctuary, disadvantages of using illegal gears and not to catch fishes in the “No Take Zone”

during ban period. This radio program highlights fishers' problems and their demands. An employee of fisheries department listens to fishers' problems over phone twice a month and gives necessary suggestions about river ecological improvement. It has been working on the development of fishers' lives and livelihoods through disseminating the knowledge on agriculture, education, health, communication, natural disasters and climate change. During the cyclone, the Radio Meghna keeps its operation on air for twenty four hours for giving the weather updates and instant precautionary measures to the community.





focus group discussions. For finding out the alternative income sources, COAST is giving them formal credit with a minimum service charge along with providing training and technical supports. Through the responsive union parishad and community legal services projects, COAST is working with the local government institutions for the betterment of the fishers. The fisher-folk committees have been formed in union, upazilla and district levels through these projects and they are trying to mediate their legitimate rights from the local government institutions. COAST is the secretariat of Bangladesh Fish Workers Alliance (BFWA); a network consisting 35 coastal based civil society NGOs. The alliance through fisher-folk committees demonstrates different events like seminar, rally and human chain for demanding the government for the proper distribution of subsidy during fishing ban period by the government. As per COAST study, it has been revealed that in a year the total hilsa production price is amounting to US\$ 2.57 billion. But the subsidy is given US\$ 25 million which stands only 0.97% of total production. COAST is also working with the Coast Guard, Navy and local administrations for keeping away the fishers from going to the rivers during the ban period. On February 8, 2017 COAST organized seminar in Dhaka demanding "Contribution of Fishing Community to National Economy should be Recognized and Addressed" where the state minister for fishery and livestock was present. The link is <http://coastbd.net/fishers-coast-guard-and-administration-should-come-together-for-hilsa-conservation/>. On February 15, 2017 COAST organized a workshop on "Adaptive Co-management for Hilsa Conservation" with the participation of fishing community, directorate of fisheries of Bangladesh Government where Deputy Commissioner of Bhola district were present. The link is [administration-should-come-together-for-hilsa-conservation. On March 6, 2017, a group of 28 Rights Based Civil Society NGOs, farmers, fishers and labour organizations has demonstrated and demanded "Immediate amendment to the draft Marine Fisheries Act 2016", which allows foreign vessels for fishing in Bangladesh territory with license. The link is <http://coastbd.net/allowing-foreign-fishing-vessels-in-bangladesh-territory-will-be-suicidal/>. These civil society groups also demanded on March 18, 2017 "For cancellation of registration of fake fishermen and giving compensation more than 7 days before starting the fishing ban period". The link is <http://coastbd.net/compensation-must-be-provided-at-least-seven-days-before-the-banning-period/>](http://coastbd.net/fishers-coast-guard-and-</p>
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Integration of ECOFISHBD Project:

"Today's Juvenile, Tomorrow's Hilsa" is the basic philosophy of the fisheries sector especially for hilsa. To increase the hilsa population, to create alternative income generating activities and to improve the resilience of the fishers ECOFISH^{BD} Project started its journey in 2015 with the financial support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). This project is being jointly implemented by COAST, WorldFish and Directorate of Fisheries of Bangladesh Government in 9 coastal districts. COAST is implementing the project in Bhola district. Its major interventions are community profiling, house hold data base, alternative income generating options,

empowering fishing community, savings and credit products managed by the community, resilience building and establishing co-management in the sanctuary areas. Through the project, the awareness on hilsa conservation by the stakeholder engagement has been increased, fishers also demonstrate their increased eagerness to obey fisheries legislation and particularly the Hilsa Fisheries Management Action Plan (HFMAP). The project has also been imparting knowledge about destructive fishing gears, as a result fishermen are avoiding these gears. Due to adopting alternative income generating activities, the monthly income of the fishers has reached to BDT 1000 (12 US\$).

Challenge faced:

1. The fishers get about 30%-35% less price in the

landing places due to influential middle man in the market chain.

2. The mechanized boat owners do not obey the ban period and they go to the rivers with destructive and illegal fishing gears where the law enforcement agencies are barely active.

3. About 40% of fake fishermen are getting the fisher identity cards through the elite influences and on the other hand 30% real fishermen are not getting fisher identity cards.

4. Each fisher family is supposed to get 40 kgs of rice per month during the ban period, but they are getting about 25-35% less.



What COAST expects for fishers in future:

1. COAST, along with the civil society networks and different fisher-folk committees, will continue the lobbying and dialogue with the government for keeping the rights and appropriate laws especially licensing and fishing systems in favor of small scale fishers.
2. COAST will work with government for ensuring the livelihood security as well as fishing security as they are attacked by the pirates frequently.
3. COAST will lead the campaign to ensure that the fishers ID cards are provided to the real fishers.
4. COAST will try for special inclusion of the fishers in the government safety net programs.
5. COAST will also campaign for opening of bank account with as little as 10 tk similarly to the farmers to include fishers in the formal credit sources.
6. COAST will work to continue the dialogue on the trans-boundary issues among Bangladesh, India and Myanmar.



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