

# Assessment of Sustainable Livelihoods on Landless Rehabilitation Programs (Abashan) in Bangladesh

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**Abstract**—A sustainable livelihood approach for landless rehabilitation programs (Abashan) is especially designed for the population under the poverty line of Bangladesh. It is a combined program to allow landless and distressed people to be stable in a particular place and engage them in income-generating activities to eradicate poverty. This is an extensive study to assess the livelihood standards of the people resettled by the Abashan project. Therefore, the study is designed to assess the livelihoods of the people resettled by the Abashan project and to examine the gap between the government aim and the achievement of the resettled people. The research covered the Gochon Abashan Project at Nandigram upazila of Bogra district in Bangladesh. Results show that most of the households' income has increased a substantial amount after rehabilitation and their living standard is also higher in comparison with others. Findings of the study reveal that apart from some snags, other provisions are creating a positive attitude towards improving sustainable livelihood standards.

**Keywords**—Sustainable livelihood, Rehabilitation project, Landless people, Poverty eradication, Income generation.

## I. INTRODUCTION

NOW in Bangladesh the average land per person is only 0.05 hectares (World Bank, 2011). The number of landless and rootless peoples are about 2 (two) millions in Bangladesh. They are the victim of river erosion and several disasters, getting no lands by inherited, sold their homestead due to poverty or their lands are acquisitioned for the development works. Due to the limited land and settlement problem, the landless and homeless people of Bangladesh roam from one place to another. Some of them settled in the government lands (*khas* land), beside the high ways or in some abandon old houses. Many of them shifted to the town from village for work and they lived in the slum area. To ensure sustainable livelihood standard for the landless poor people, the Government of Bangladesh took many rehabilitation projects including housing, land, income generating trainings and debt facility like Abashan Project. Governments try to implement the Sustainable Livelihoods Approach (SLA) to improve understanding of the livelihoods of poor people by providing various government facilities. In Bangladesh UNDP most often works at the national level and runs specific programs and activities at district and village level. For UNDP

the SL approach serves primarily as a programming framework to devise a set of integrated support activities to improve the sustainability of livelihoods among poor and vulnerable groups by strengthening the resilience of their coping and adaptive strategies in Bangladesh. So, to ensure the international standard the indicators of measuring level of sustainable livelihood by UNDP were taken in consideration in this research work. The objectives of the study were i) to assess the livelihood of the people resettled by the *Abashan* project and ii) to examine the gap between the government aim and the achievement of the resettled people. Two specific research questions were helped to fulfill the answer of the research objective of this study i) how far the project target was achieved for the livelihood of the people of the *Abashan* project and ii) what was/were the obstacle(s), if there any snag to attain the objective of the project? Land, food, water, health, debt, literacy, participation, job opportunity etc were the sustainable livelihood indicators that had an effect on success of the project. So it is possible to draw conclusion that these indicators are functioning as inputs and these inputs are converted into output in form of sustainable livelihood and promotion of income generation.

The provisions of *Abashan* project in a brief are as follows:

1. 0.08 acres land for homestead with dwelling space (01 room) and kitchen, 02(two) block latrines for 10(ten) families, 01(one) tube-well for each barrack (ten families) and 01(one) community center for social purpose for all beneficiaries of the project area.
2. Agricultural land at adjacent project area, a pond for fish culture and grazing ground for the cattle of the beneficiaries. House and land are handed over to the beneficiaries through registered deeds and mutation of records by the local land office.
3. Providing trainings in different trades and skill development for income generation activities with focus on women empowerment.
4. A credit provision to facilitate income generation activities in line with trainings provided. The credit disbursement is conducted by govt. and semi-govt. organizations.
5. There is a provision of Co-operative formation to raise capital for economic activities through group savings.
6. Primary education for the children and mass education for adult literacy.

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7. Health care and family planning services provided to ensure population control and maternal and child health.
8. Emphasizing and facilitating plantation and vegetable farming in project area (Project Proposal, *Ashrayan*, 2000).

Apart from the above mentioned provisions, electricity connection and creation of incentives for income generation and productive activities like cottage industry, handicrafts and poultry farms were included. Moreover location of projects is instructed to be selected near growth centers to support income generation activities of the beneficiaries (Project Proposal, *Abashan*, 2003).

Project provisions are set to settlement of landless and rootless rural families and creation of sustainable livelihood opportunities and above all promotion of human development among the beneficiaries. Viability of these provisions requires deep concern and monitoring activities. Therefore, scope of empirical study is widely open to understand whether the project provisions create environment for sustainable livelihood level for the beneficiaries.

## II. METHODOLOGY

The study were used both qualitative and quantitative methods whereby the questionnaires were prepared in terms of semi-structured and unstructured according to the type of stakeholders to be asked, those were included, local government officers and settled people.

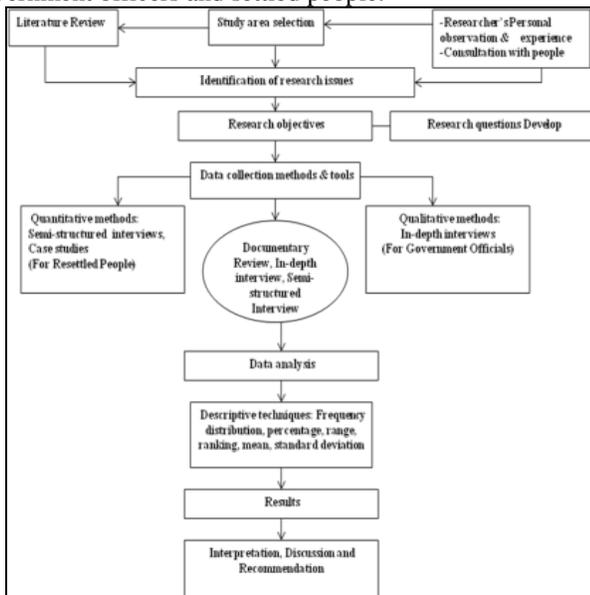


Fig. 1: Research design of the study

The data were analyzed by using thematic analysis (for qualitative) and statistical technique in quantitative data. The data for this study were collected both from primary and secondary sources. The primary data were collected through questionnaires and interviews from the beneficiaries and government officials of the study area. The Secondary information and data were collected from respective government offices and agencies. The resources were included online publications, books, governmental reports, international reports, scientific journals and news articles that focused on

related rehabilitation issues in Bangladesh.

TABLE 1: METHODOLOGY AND THE OUTCOME OF THE STUDY

Procedure	Methodology	Outcome
Data collection	Household survey	Level of Sustainable livelihood of the Project
	In-depth interview	i) Role of Sustainable livelihood indicators ii) Project goals vs. achievements iii) Project gap and suggestions iv) Strength and weakness of the project

The qualitative data from interviews and literature reviews were analyzed using content analysis and logical analysis techniques. Whereas the quantitative data were analyzed using Windows 10 Microsoft Word and Excel integrated package on a personal computer and the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) software version 21. There were three different methods of analysis, including Descriptive statistics, Independent t-test and Chi square, whereby the descriptive statistics was used in explaining and showing the sustainable livelihood level of the respondents, i.e the household information, sources of income, while under descriptive statistics further narrow down to analyze independent t-test and Chi square; these test were used to show the comparison and significance between before and settlement in the project based on the questionnaires.

There are total 130 (One hundred thirty) respondents from both beneficiaries of the study site and Government officials were taken interview for primary data collection purpose of this study. 120 men and women from resettled community were considered for Semi structured questionnaire and interview. For 10 (ten) Government officials from the union level to district level were considered for the in- depth interview.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

About present occupation it has been found out that most of the respondents are engaged in more than one income generating activities which mostly include agriculture labour (26.7 percent), rickshaw/van pulling (0.8 percent), farmer (16.7percent), day labour (10.8 percent), service/ industrial worker (5.8 percent), business (1.7 percent) and likewise activities. Women usually work as housewives and are simultaneously involved in different IGAs. There are 32.5 percent women are housewife in nature but most of them are participating with the males in poultry/cattle rearing (2.5 percent). In case female respondents most of the respondents are involved in cottage industries, tailoring and for male respondents they are also involved in other works apart from the description (1.7 percent). The result shows that 0.8 percent respondent of the study area has no work during the survey.

Poultry and cattle rearing are now popular events. It considered as both a main and secondary occupation and supplementary activity for small farmers. It is remarkable that very few respondents had salaried jobs. The findings suggest

that after settled in the project the beneficiaries involved themselves in income generation activities and increased their earning simultaneously.

About previous condition, 12.5 percent of respondents (15) asserted that their living condition at past was very bad and they had no income where as 81.7 percent (98) termed their previous condition as not very bad and they were in lower income group (1000-3000 BDT). Rest 5.8 percent of respondents (7) noted that their living condition at past was not so good where their income was in middle income group (3001-6000 BDT).

About present condition, 0.8 percent of respondents (1) asserted that their living condition still very bad and they have no income where as 80.8 percent (97) respondents said their present condition is not very bad and they are in lower income group (1000-3000 BDT). Other 13.3 percent of respondents (16) noted that their living condition at present is not so good where their income was in middle income group (3001-6000 BDT). But rest 5 percent (6) respondents are migrated to upper income group (6000 and above) from lower and middle income group.

Before settlement in *Gochon Abashan project* the income was pretty bad than present condition. The result shows that respondents from No income group was 1 person and now it remain 1 person. For lower income group (1000-3000 BDT) it was 13 people but it is now 84 people during survey. In middle income group (3001-6000BDT) it was only one people but after rehabilitation this number increased into 14 people at present. On the other hand there was no upper income group (6000- Above) people was found before settlement in this project but there are 6 people of upper income group were detected during data collection.

After settled in the project all the respondents became able to increase their monthly income. Trainings, credit facilities, education and health facilities create job opportunities which have the direct and indirect influence on increasing monthly income (fig: 2).

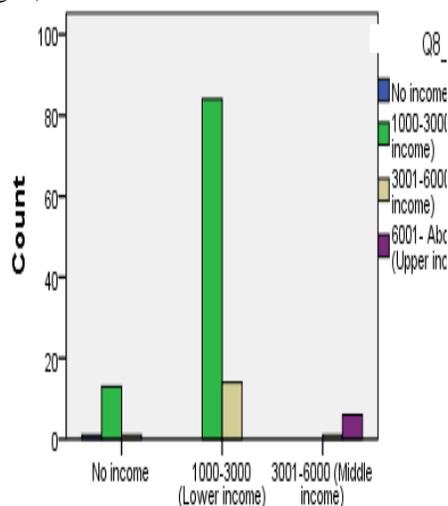


Fig. 2: Comparison between previous and present income (n=120)

#### IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Only eight explanatory indicators were selected and their quantitative effects on household income were determined.

The eight indicators such as land, food, water, health, ability to pay back debt, literacy, participation on government events and job opportunity had a significant contribution to the household income. The effect of indicators on the household income is discussed below. The discussion made a relationship between the aforesaid indicators and collected data and information in the present study.

Analyzing utility and implication of land it has been observed that homestead and vegetable garden and pond provides the beneficiaries with scope of earning as well as security and comfort. Allotment of agricultural land would have helped the beneficiaries to improve their economic condition. As a consequence the allottees showed their discontent about quantity of land. So, inadequacy of land is affecting progress of the beneficiaries towards their endeavor to income generation opportunities. Still its inadequacy cannot restrain the creation of IGA's of the beneficiaries to a greater extent.

The project beneficiaries reported that their food availability depends on their habits, seasonal availability of foods, household income and number of family members, preference, culture, time constraints and nutritional constraints. In the study area usually the beneficiaries spend more money for purchasing food items when their income increases. Tango (2006) mentioned that during the months of *Kartrik* (mid-September and continues until mid-November) and *Chaitra* (mid-March to mid-April) of Bengali year poor rural people suffer from food insecurity in Bangladesh. In the present study, most of the respondents said that almost every year they suffer from food crises before the annual harvest. Food insecurity especially occurs due to no lands and high price of food. In addition, natural calamities, especially river erosion, flood and drought add to worsen such food insecurity because they reduce production.

Groundwater was the main source of drinking water in the study area. Hundred percent of the respondents agreed that they are using safe and pure drinking water from the tube-well. For 120 household there are 12 tube-wells for drinking water in the study area. Respondents are usually using pond water for bathing, washing clothes and other household uses but due to impurity they don't use pond water for drinking. Sometimes they face problems when tube-wells are out of order. Because an average 40 people accessing one tube-well and during the dry season when the water level goes down it also creates misery for the beneficiaries. So, it is necessary to set up deep tube-well and increased the number of tube-well in the study area.

During the survey, most of the respondents reported that very often they visit the government hospital and community clinic when they become sick. These government hospital and community clinic offer them free treatment and medicines. Some of them reported that these hospitals and clinic provided free treatment but the level of service is not up to the mark. So they prefer to visit private hospitals and clinics for treatment. But the number of this service taker is not so much. Majority of the respondents were poor and they are happy with service from government hospital and community clinic. Usually the upper income group can access this facility.

Debts repayment also has impact on the household income of the respondents like other SLA indicators. Regular debts repayment generally creates good relationship and increases confidence, which helps beneficiaries to obtain further debt from debt sources for IGAs. There were a number of reasons to fail the debt pay back. Very often they use debts to mitigate their emergency needs like buying food, dowry payments, household repair and health treatment. There is a chance to not investing in production or income generation.

There is a positive correlation between project proponent's educational level and their household income. A survey among the rural farmers in Bangladesh has been conducted by Mahmudul et al. (2003) and they found that literate farmers' income is higher than the illiterate farmers. These outcomes of education might help to involve in new IGA's changing and improving their existing situations. Therefore, literacy skills of the beneficiaries have a direct impact on their household income.

Participation in government and social events had a significant positive impact on the household income of the project beneficiaries. Different governmental social safety net program like Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) to feed the extremely poor, Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) to improve the quality of life and enhance the productive income generating opportunities, Food For Work (FFW) to increase food security for the poor, Employment Generation Program for the Poorest (EGPP) to provide short-term employment to the hardcore poor in lean seasons. Several studies and the present study reported that Non Government Organization (NGOs) play a vital role for income generation among the rural poor people. NGOs provide debt in micro-credit programs to the members of their working society. Participation of people with NGOs positively contributes to household income and derives more income from rural non-farm sources as they participate in micro-credit programs (Hashemi et al., 1996; Khandker, 1998).

In the study area, respondents are basically depended on agriculture and wage labour to earn money. Elder family members usually work as paid labor in agriculture which increases the household income. The agriculture of Bangladesh is labor-intensive and boy children are usually involved in cattle rearing, and girl children worked as a maid which adds to more income. Therefore, family members are treated as an asset, since every member after a certain age can contribute to the household income. In Bangladesh, boys usually take part in fishing and caretaking of cattle around the age of 8 or 9, and girls enter the household labor force by the age of 6 or 7 (Anwar, 2004). Therefore, engaging different activities has an important socio-economic indicator as it affects the household income of the project proponents.

The existing situation in the study area regarding six assets (UNDP) has been discussed where the level of good and satisfaction perceptions by the respondents were taken into consideration. The highest cumulative frequency score was obtained for physical asset (110) in good category followed by political asset (25), social asset (19), human asset (17), natural asset (7) and economic asset (2). The results indicate that in satisfactory category the highest cumulative frequency score

was obtained for social asset (96) followed by human asset (92), political asset (80), natural asset (22), economic asset (11) and physical asset (6). As per the results natural and economic assets were not satisfactory in the study area, and the participation of the respondents in economic activities was very low. Physical, social, human and political assets did not attain their highest level, but their status was relatively better than other livelihood assets (fig: 3).

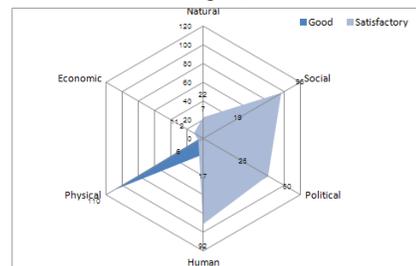


Fig. 3: Perception of existing Assets (n=120)

Therefore, priority should be given to assist facilities for the improvement of natural asset (land, vegetation and common property) and economic asset (job opportunity, debt facility and savings) which would play key role to increase the livelihood status of the study area. This result indicates that eight livelihood indicators of this study are needed to be developed to obtain sustainable livelihood assets for the surveyed study area.

#### V. PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The study reveals that the selection criterion was not followed during the selection phase. Pressure groups interfered to select ineligible people in the project who create obstacles towards project goals. Strong selection process is required which may include identification of genuine landless families and emphasis on families from adjacent areas. Local community leaders may include in this process.
- Findings of the research indicate that the income of a household is significantly related with the size of agricultural land. The project proponents can grow more vegetables and fruits by using scientific technology in their existing land. If they will award more cultivable lands by the project that will bless for them. After their household consumption they can earn by selling the surplus productions.
- The exposure of training should be motivating with new ideas to engaging various types of income generating activities. A need-based intensive training can enhance and improve creativity, confidence, personal skills which are key to become self-reliance. So, regional and local need-based training can be imparted to the beneficiaries for opening the door of employment opportunity to them.
- In the study area, credit facility helped beneficiaries to be in better conditions like education, food availability, savings and livelihood status, which reflect positive indication in livelihood improvement. Adequate financial support at low interest rates from financial institutions can

be helpful to conduct new IGAs and thereby increase household income of the beneficiaries. Close monitoring and follow up support from Government officials can help to ensure the proper use of debts money.

- Co-operative society which is formed as per project directive seems dormant in assisting income generation activities among the members because of its faulty mechanism. So, it needs to be activated in order to support the members like their own financier. Thus, it will boost up earning activities among the beneficiaries. Beneficiaries can raise capital and may start debt facility among the members.
- Involvement in Government and community activities need to be considered for uplifting sustainable livelihood status of the beneficiaries. Livelihood development issues of community should be given preference in the interventions of union council at the local level. Thus, the influential section can play a dominant role in improving living standard of the community.
- A Job opportunity was not available in the study area. Because of that many male beneficiaries move on for the work in different parts of the country including capital city. Setup of agricultural based industries may help to decrease joblessness and may also create some job opportunity as well. Bangladesh small and cottage industry corporation (BSCIC) can take initiatives to setup small scale industry in the study area.

## VI. CONCLUSION

Abashan rehabilitation program with sustainable livelihood approach is taken to protect the poor so that their position does not worsen than at present. This project is undertaken to rehabilitate the extreme poor or absolute poor and provide them shelter, training, credit so that they are able to be self employed. A small piece of land and pond have been provided to them so that they can produce vegetables and fishes in those respective areas. After getting training and credit facilities, they engage in some income generating activities to increase income for better livelihood. Besides this, rehabilitation project provides them some other facilities such as community center where they used to gather for participating different government and community's problem solving events. Government primary school and community clinic for child education and health care. After setting in rehabilitation project most of the household's income has increased to a substantial amount and their living standard also in comparison with non-rehabilitates. The project acts directly on the civil and human rights of the target population and intervene in order to improve their living conditions, education, health and earning opportunities which indicates the sustainable livelihood. Therefore, the quantitative analysis suggests that the selected eight livelihood indicators of the present study should be emphasized in the planning of government organizations. Government development agencies, who are involving in the study area and also other rehabilitation projects, may give proper attention on the result of the present study before launching any new program related to improvement of

rehabilitate beneficiaries livelihood status through income generating activities. In addition, qualitative issues of the study area should also be considered.

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