

Poverty and Socio-physical Capitals of Coastal People in Bangladesh

Abu Saleh Mohammad Noman*

Abstract: Poverty is the condition or state of a person who lacks livelihood capitals or assets to meet his or her basic needs. Physical Capital of livelihoods of coastal community consists of road, transport, electricity, shelter, market, adequate drainage facilities, telecommunication, clean water etc. that make people able to pursue their livelihood strategies. Social capital comprises the relation or network, trust, access to information, groups etc. A significant number of people of Bangladesh still live under poverty line and most of them live in remote or ecologically fragile parts known as coastal belts which cover a substantial part of land area of the country. The study examines the socio-physical capitals or assets of livelihoods of coastal char community of Bangladesh and explores the nexus between social network and power or safety net, education and gender preference, land ownership and dowry practice, occupation and housing accommodation and education and sanitation practice. The study found that, in coastal community of Bangladesh, gender preference and dowry are interrelated, social networks generate social power and social safety and irrespective of their occupations the coastal people face acute housing crisis.

Keywords: Poverty, Social Capital, Physical Capital, Social Network, Power, Social Safety, Housing Accommodation, Sanitation

1. Introduction

More than 50 million people of Bangladesh still live under poverty line and many of these people live in remote or ecologically fragile parts of the country, such as river islands and cyclone-prone coastal belts like *Bayer Char*, which are especially vulnerable to natural disasters (BCCSAP, 2009)¹. The coastal region (Char/Shoal) covers 32.0% of Bangladesh where, in spite of harsh physical condition, 35 million people live and developed their own adaptive strategies to the vagaries of nature (Rabbani et al. 2013; Haque, et al. 2017)^{2,3}.

*Dr. Abu Saleh Mohammad Noman, Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology, Eden Mohila College, Dhaka

The people of coastal areas in Bangladesh developed a social network which provides them with power and works as an important social capital required to survive in these natural disaster prone areas. Their physical assets' condition is very vulnerable and disappointing. They are seriously deprived of minimum level of housing and sanitation. This has made the life and living of the population in this coastal char area constantly more challenging than any other coastal chars areas of the country (White: 1958)⁴.

Inhabitants of this area are marginal and destitute people, who could be categorized as the poorest of the poor living in the country (Jansen, 1987; Bagee, 1998)^{5,6}. The people living in coastal char areas like Bayer Char are much more impoverished from the aspects of sociophysical capitals than those who live in other regions of rural Bangladesh (Noman, 2020)⁷.

They develop a relationship with different organizations (NGOs) to make their life and livelihood secure but, most of the time, they are exploited by these NGOs (Noman, 2023)⁸. The ongoing climate change will certainly worsen the poverty state of the people of coastal region (Burton et al., 2002)⁹ and will make them destitute class if proper measures are not executed by the government and NGOs (Mahbub Ullah, 1996; Noman, 2013)^{10,11}.

2. Objectives of The Study

The prime objective of the study was to examine the socio-physical capitals or assets of livelihoods of coastal char community of Bangladesh. Another objective was to explore the nexus between social network and power or safety net, education and gender preference, land ownership and dowry practice, occupation and housing accommodation and education and sanitation practice.

3. Methodology of the Study

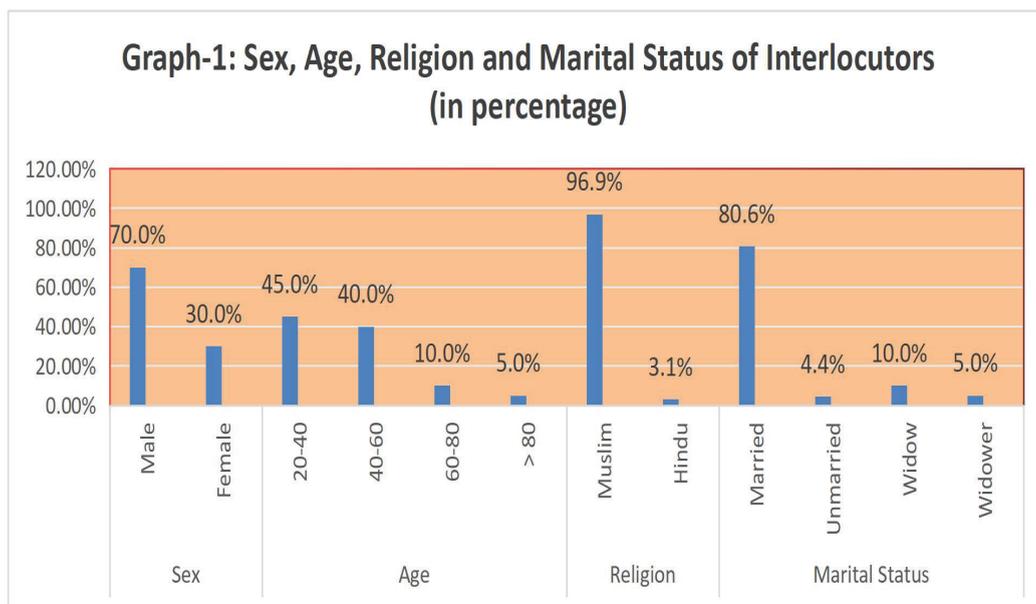
The study is integrative in nature i.e., integration of quantitative with qualitative. Data collection method was social survey (for quantitative) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD, for qualitative). The findings of the study were based on primary sources of data but some secondary data were used for comparison and making the result more meaningful. The people of Char Alek Jander and Teliar Char were the population of the study. In selecting sample size, systematic sampling and purposive sampling

were used in quantitative and qualitative studies respectively. The heads of the households were the unit of analysis. Collected quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS V. 29 software and qualitative data were merged into quantitative.

4. Demographic Characteristics of the Interlocutors

4.1 Sex, Age, Religion and Marital Status of Interlocutors:

Graph- 1 points out that, a substantial percentage (70.0%) of interlocutors (112) are male where only 30.0% are female. From age perspective, a number number (72) of interlocutors fall between 20 and 40 age and a narrow figure (8) fall at 80 age or above. 64 interlocutors' age is between 40 and 60 year; and 16 interlocutors' age is between 60 and 80 year.

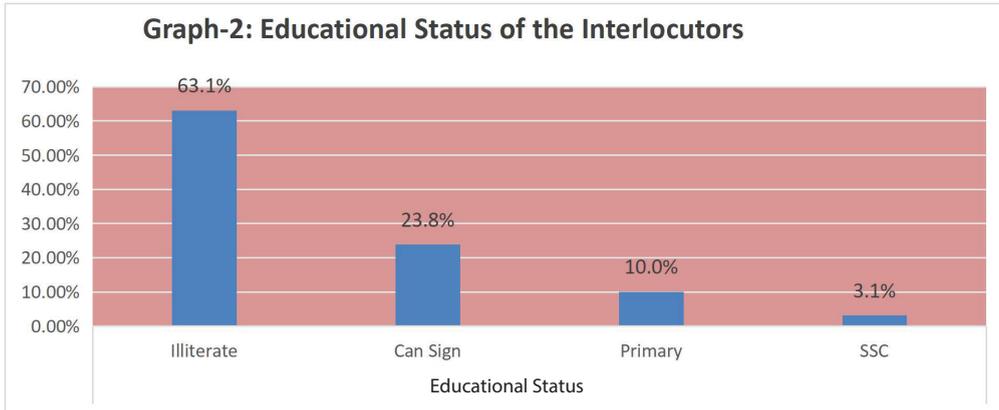


(Source: Field Data, 2024)

Out of the total interlocutors, 155 (96.9%) interlocutors are Muslim and only 5 (3.1%) interlocutors are Hindu. There was no any respondent of other religion. From marital status, most of the interlocutors (80.6%) are married where unmarried are only 4.4%. The totality of widow and widower is 15.0% (respectively 10.0% & 5.0%). Among the total female headed households 33.4% are widow and among male headed interlocutors 7.2% are widower.

4.2 Educational Status of the Interlocutors:

Graph-2 states that, a significant percentage (63.1%) of interlocutors are illiterate and 23.8% can sign only. The primary and secondary passed interlocutors are only

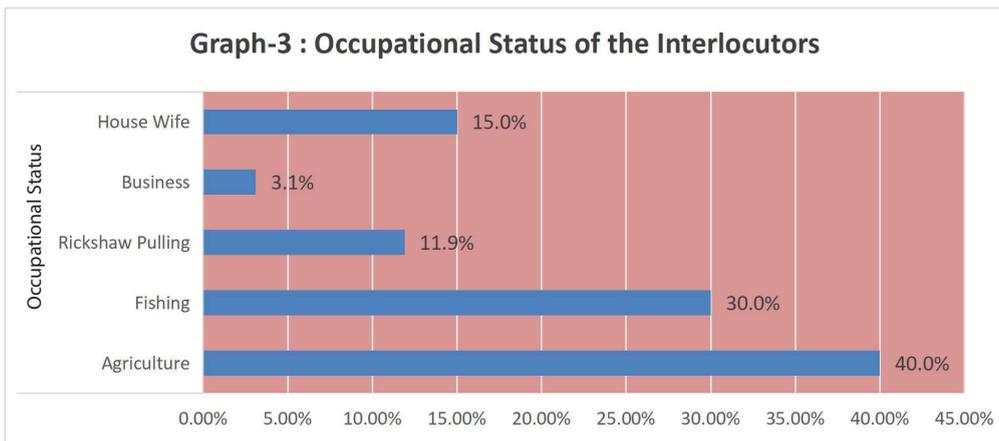


(Source: Field Data, 2024)

respectively 10.0%, and 3.1%. There were not found any higher secondary or graduate level interlocutors.

4.3 Occupational Status of Interlocutors:

Among the total interlocutors, most of the interlocutors' occupation is agriculture (64).

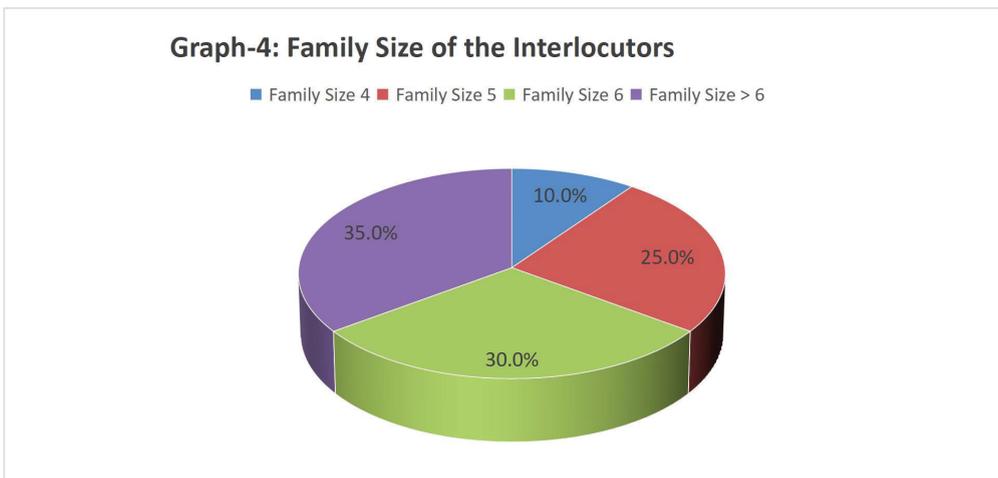


(Source: Field Data, 2024)

The second highest number of interlocutors engaged in fishing (30.0%). There are 24 interlocutors who are housewives among the total interlocutors. The number of interlocutors who are related to business and household activities are 3.1% (5) and 15.0% (24) respectively (Graph-3)

4.4 Family Size:

Graph-4 indicates that 35.00% families have more than six members and six- member-family is the second highest (30.0%) among the total interlocutors.



(Source: Field Data, 2024)

The percentage of four member families is 15.0% and the 25.0% families' number of member is 5.

5. Social Assets

5.1 Sources of Social Power:

Table-1 implies that when total interlocutors were asked whether they go to mosque, 62.5% replied positively and only 37.5% replied negatively. Char people are poor and that is why they practice prayer. Of those who practice prayer in mosque, 65% informed that they go to mosque for religious cause,.

Table-1: Going to Mosque and Its Causes

		Going to mosque?	
		Yes	Total
Causes	Religious	65	65
	Social	15	15
	Mental satisfaction	16	16
	Other	4	4
Total		100	100

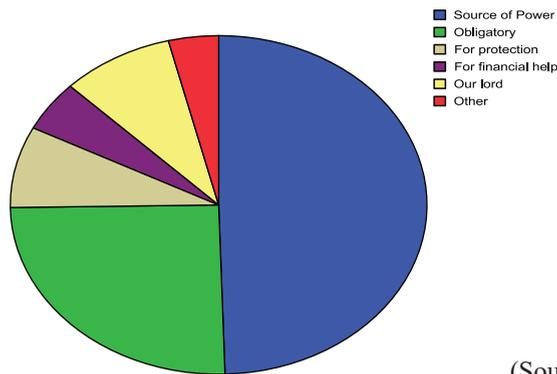
(Source: Field Data, 2024)

60.0% for mental satisfaction and 15.0% for social cause. It indicates that going to mosque is a source of social power and status

5.2 Politics and Livelihood:

According to the graph-5, in response to the question whether they have any relation with politics, out of the total interlocutors, 64.4% (103) replied positively and 35.6% (57) replied negatively. When the interlocutors who have relation with politics, were asked what are the causes of their taking relationship with politics,.

Graph-5: Politics and Sources of Power (In Percent)



(Source: Field Data, 2024)

49.5% (51) of them replied that it is the sources of power; and 25.2% stated that they are obliged to take relation with politics, 7.8% said for protection and 8.7% said that they engaged with politics because the politicians are their lord. So, it indicates that the char people are subordinated to the political leaders who are the lords of land and it also empowered the people .

5.3 Gender Preference and Dowry :

In response to this question whose they prefer from boys and girls, a significant number of interlocutors (117) asserted that they prefer boys to girls (Table-2). They are the 73.1% of the total interlocutors. Of them 86.3% interlocutors are illiterate and they are the 63.1% of the total interlocutors.

Table-2: Educational Qualification and Gender Preference (in Number and Percentage)

		Gender preference (% within raw)			Total
		Boy	Girl	Both	
Educational qualification	Illiterate	101 (100%)	-	-	101 (100%)
	Can Sign	-	22 (57.9%)	16 (42.1%)	38 (100%)
	Primary	16 (100%)	-	-	16 (100%)
	SSC	-	-	5 (100%)	5 (100%)
Total		117	22	21	160

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

Who are primary passed, all of them prefer boys and who are SSC passed all of them prefer boys and girls both. It indicates that lower level of education is in active in case of poverty. The cause of it is they think boys can earn income and they can help them at the old age, on the contrary, girls are the load for family, she will go to husband's house, for her marriage father will have to manage a vast amount of dowry. It is evident from the table-46 that when the interlocutors were asked if there is any practice of dowry, 88.75% (142) of interlocutors, out of total informed that there is dowry practice in this char and only 11.25% interlocutors said negatively. So gender preference and dowry are interrelated.

Who said there is dowry practiced in this char, 59.9%, of them, are landless which is 88.5% of total landless interlocutors. 87.5% of large land owner and 90.0% of medium land owner replied that they also practiced dowry. Out of the total dowry practiced interlocutors, 78.9% (112) interlocutors asserted that they took.

Table-3: Ownership of Land and Dowry Practice (in Number of Interlocutors)

		Ownership of Land					Total
		Landless	Marginal	Small	Medium	Large	
Dowry practice	Yes	85	29	12	9	7	142
	No	11	3	2	1	1	18
Total		96	32	14	10	8	160

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

dowry and 64.8% (92) said they gave dowry in their sons' marriage (Table-3) and only 21.1% (30) informed that they did not any kind of dowry, this is the 18.8% of total interlocutors. It indicates that dowry is practiced in the whole char irrespective of poor or rich and the practice of taking is more than giving dowry.

Table-4 states that in response to the question what kind of dowry they practiced, 62.0% (88) out of the total dowry practiced interlocutors, informed cash money as it is directly related to.

Table-4: Giving Dowry and Kind of Dowry (in Number of Interlocutors)

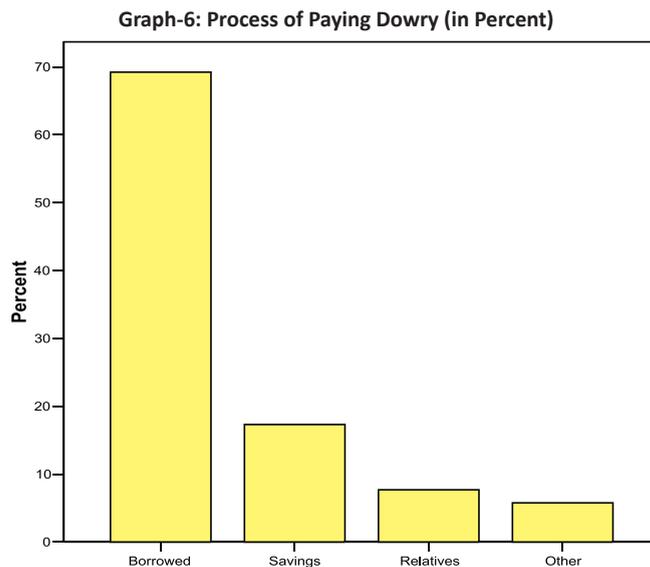
		Kind of Dowry							Total
		Cycle/watch	Radio/TV	Shop	Gold	Land	Cash money	Other	
Giving dowry	Yes	13	6	1	2	7	57	6	92
	no	7	4	1	1	3	31	3	50
Total		20	10	2	3	10	88	9	142

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

survivability of life and its utility is very easy; of them, 64.8% interlocutors asserted that they gave dowry. Cycle/watch is such matter as used as the second highest (14.0%) in dowry practice.

5.4 Dowry and Loan:

Graph-6 shows that the highest number of interlocutors (45.0%) informed that they collected the payment of dowry by taking loan, only 7.3% by savings, 7.7 by relatives' help and 5.8% from other sources. So, for collecting dowry, most of the char people are engaged in vicious circle of loan. The 'other



(Source: Field Data, 2024)

sources' indicates that for collecting dowry some of the char people have to engaged in illegal and immoral activities.

6. PHYSICAL ASSETS

6.1 Units and Rooms of House:

Table-5 states that a significant number (78.8%) of interlocutors' house was observed as one unit; of them, the highest number (35.7%) of interlocutors' family member is more than 6 and 29.4% interlocutors' family size is 6. Only 4 interlocutors' house is above 3 units.

Table-5: Size of Family and Number of Units of Houses (in Number of Interlocutors)

		Number of unit				Total
		1	2	3	above 3	
Number of family members	4	12	2	1	1	16
	5	32	5	3	0	40
	6	37	6	3	2	48
	6<	45	7	3	1	56
Total		126	20	10	4	160

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

Of those interlocutors whose family size is more than 6, 80.4% interlocutors' number of room of house is only one. It indicates their extreme poverty.

When the interlocutors were asked how many rooms of their house are, most of the interlocutors (43.1%) replied that there is only one room in their house;

Table-6: Number of Family Member and Rooms of the Houses (in Number of Interlocutors)

		No of rooms					Total
		1	2	3	4	above 5	
Number of family members	4	6	6	2	1	1	16
	5	19	15	5	1	0	40
	6	19	21	5	2	1	48
	6<	25	23	7	1	0	56
Total		69	65	19	5	2	160

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

of them the highest number (36.2%) of interlocutors' family size is more than 6. Out of the total interlocutors, 40.6% said the room of their house is 2, of them the highest number of interlocutors' family size is 6 (Table-6).

In table-7, it is stated that a significant number of interlocutors (83.8%) informed that the room of their house is not sufficient for their family; of them the highest number of interlocutors (39.6%) are farmers and the second highest (29.9%) is fisher men. Of the interlocutors whose occupation is rickshaw pulling, 94.7% mentioned that their accommodation is not sufficient. All of these interlocutors who said their accommodation is not sufficient, have to spend about all of their income in managing food and are not able to build or reconstruct.

Table-7: Occupation of the Interlocutors and Sufficiency of Rooms (in Number of Interlocutors)

		Sufficiency of rooms		Total
		Yes	NO	
Occupation of the interlocutors	Agriculture	11	53	64
	Fisheries	8	40	48
	Rickshaw Puller	1	18	19
	Business	2	3	5
	Housewife	4	20	24
Total		26	134	160

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

their houses. Only 16.3%, out of the total, responded that their housing accommodation is sufficient; of them, 42.3% are farmer and 30.8% are fisher men. The cause of the sufficiency of their accommodation may be the small number of family members or some of the family members stay at boat in the river. 83.3% of the total female interlocutors mentioned that their housing accommodation is not sufficient because the females have to lead their households and face a lot of crises, have to manage the livelihoods of the total family, and cannot move freely to earn money. That is why they cannot give the attention to improve their houses.

6.2 Roofs and Walls:

It was observed that, the wall of the house of 30.6% interlocutors is built by straw and the floor of the house of all the interlocutors is cancha. Out of the total interlocutors the floor of the house of 96.3% interlocutors is cancha- built by mud. Only 3.8% interlocutors' house roof is pucca; of them, all the interlocutors' house wall is pucca i.e., built of brick. The wall of 20.0% of the total interlocutors is tin; of them 100.0% interlocutors' house floor is cancha. 21.9% of total

Table-8: Type of Wall and Types of Floor

		Types of floor		Total
		Pucca	Cancha	
Types of wall	Brick	6	1	7
	Tin	0	32	32
	Straw	0	49	49
	Leaves	0	35	35
	Open	0	37	37
Total		6	154	160

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

interlocutors' house wall is leaves and 23.1% interlocutors' houses have no wall but open (Table-8). These people are the poorest of the poor in this char. They are deprived from the minimum need of house accommodation. They are deprived of the basic need of life.

6.3 Sanitation:

It is described in the table-9 that a large number of interlocutors (121) use pit latrine, who are the 75.6% of the total interlocutors, of them, 83.5% interlocutors are illiterate. Out of the total interlocutors, only 10.0% interlocutors informed that they used sanitary latrine; of them, 75.0% interlocutors. are primary passed. Those who are SSC

Table-9: Educational Qualification and Sanitation (in Number of Interlocutors)

		Sanitation			Total
		Sanitary	Pit	Other	
Educational qualification	Illiterate	0	101	0	101
	Can Sign	0	20	23	38
	Primary	12	0	0	16
	SSC	4	0	0	5
Total		16	121	23	160

(Source: Field Data, 2024)

passed, 80.0% of them used sanitary latrine. It indicates that, education has a significant influence on sanitation. The more people will be educated, the more they will use sanitary toilet.

7. Conclusion

The existence of a social network based on participation with politics (64.4%), going to mosque (89.3%), friendship, kinship, work, loan and time increases char people's ability to work together and provides them with power and safety net. A social network creates social capital (49.5%) for the poor, providing them with the means to survive in coastal area being a part of a group. But sometimes, this network with NGOs and leaders of landless people is a strong weapon of domination and exploitation, makes the relationship of slave master and slave, feudal lord and serf. The population of char is ever increasing. Most of the households are 6 (30.0%) and more than 6 (35.0%) member family because of lack of education and information about family planning, unavailability of family planning devices (50.4%) and extreme religiosity (28.4%). A significant number of people have one-room house (43.1%) or two-room house (40.6%) made up of straw or hay (30.6%). The floor of their houses is *cancha* (96.3%) and some of them have houses of without wall i.e., open (23.1%) which are frequently destroyed by the normal natural disasters. On the other hand, there is a scarcity of woods/trees to reform or make the houses of poor people. They use open latrine (75.6%) that causes various diseases as diarrhoea, cholera and fever. This has made the life and living of the population in this coastal char constantly more challenging than any other coastal chars of the country. Inhabitants of this area are

marginal and destitute people, who could be categorized as the poorest of the poor living in the country. The coastal chars in Bangladesh have not sincerely been in the focus of development efforts of the public or the private agencies. One of the reasons for this is the highly dynamic physical and socio-economic conditions characterizing the chars of the country. This study has identified the need and possibilities for more attention to be given to the management of the riverine chars of Bangladesh. This would be of direct benefit to the char people and also contribute to the overall development of the country. Since the erosion and flood hazards of chars are difficult to control through structural measures, management intervention should aim at policy and administrative improvements to enable people to cope better with this hazardous environment. In formulating long-term approaches, it would be important to devote special attention to the possible changes in the physical capitals of coastal people of Bangladesh.

References

1. BANGLADESH CLIMATE CHANGE STRATEGY AND ACTION PLAN 2008. Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh
2. Rabbani et al. 2013. *Salinity-induced loss and damage to farming households in coastal Bangladesh*, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, PDF available in International Journal of Global Warming Vol. 5, No. 4, 2013(4):400-415.
3. Haque et al. 2017. *Impact of char livelihood program (CLP) of char land dwellers around the char areas in Sirajgonj district of Bangladesh*, Fundamental and Applied Agriculture.
4. White, K. de 1958. *OUT OF THE PERIPHERY: Development of Coastal Chars in Southern Bangladesh*, University Press Limited, Dhaka.
5. Jansen, G.E. 1987. *Rural Bangladesh: Competition for Scarce Resources*, Dhaka: The University Press Limited.
6. Baqee, A. 1998. *Peopling in the Land of Allah Jaane: The case of Char-Lands of Bangladesh*, The University Press Limited, Dhaka, Bangladesh. P.5
7. Noman, ASM. 2020. *Human Capital of Char People's Livelihoods in Bangladesh*, CenRaPS Journal of Social Sciences, Article No: 20_V2_I1_A11, doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.
8. Noman, ASM. 2023. *Coastal Community, Poverty and Climate Change Adaptation: An Anthropological Study of Bayer Char Community*, OJS/PKP, Dhaka University, Dhaka.
9. Burton et al., 2002. *From Impacts Assessment to Adaptation Priorities: The Shaping of Adaptation Policy*, Climate Policy 2 (2002) 145–159, Research Gate.
10. Mahbub Ullah. 1996. *Land Livelihood and Change in Rural Bangladesh*, University Press Limited (UPL), Dhaka
11. Noman, ASM. 2013. *Natural Assets and Livelihood Pattern of Char People of Lakshmipur in Bangladesh*, Society and Change, Vol, V11, No. 2, April-June, pp. 62-63, OSDER.