

**043 River Bank Erosion Impact Study: Response Strategies to the Problem of Landlessness, Rural Impoverization and Marginalization**  
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**a) Researchers' Identity**

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**b) Objectives**

The broad objective of the study is to examine the impact of river bank erosion on problem of landlessness, rural impoverization and marginalization and response strategies there of. The specific areas covered in the study are:

- i. To identify the present socio-economic condition of the river bank erosion affected people;
- ii. To find out the nature and magnitude of the problems caused by riverbank erosion;
- iii. To study the survival strategy of the displaced persons; and
- iv. To suggest probable strategies to redress the sufferings of the landless people affected by riverbank erosion.

**c) Executive summary**

Bangladesh, the largest delta in the world, is a country of rivers and streams. It has an area of 55,598 square miles or 143,998 square Kilo meters with a population of about 101.7 million or a population density of 706 per square Kilo metres. Therefore, land in this country is a scarce resource. According to WHW 75% of the rural population live below the poverty line. About 50% of rural households and population are functionally landless. Day by day the poor are becoming poorer, small farmers are becoming landless and landless are becoming uprooted. Riverbank erosion is one of the most important factors for destruction of lands and dislocation of settlements and thereby making people landless.

Riverbank erosion does not merely end up destroying lives or damaging crops or dislocating communication, it also intensifies the existing process of landlessness and impoverization in rural Bangladesh.

Most of the rivers in Bangladesh are characterized by bank erosion. According to Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB) the erosion of the Brahmaputra - Jamuna has affected as many as 43 places (length of erosion is 5,33,280 feet); that of the Ganges-Padma has affected 26 places (length of erosion is 3,09,820 feet); that of the Meghna erosion has affected 8 places (length of erosion is 2,19,960 feet) and the Tista has also affected 8 places. Besides, other rivers of Bangladesh such as the Kushiara, the Surma, the Manu, the Gumti and the Matamuhari have seriously caused river bank erosion in their respective adjacent areas where the settlers particularly the landless are increasingly encountering the extreme realities of existence.

When the river starts eroding, all households become anxious to move out of the threatened area. Some of them move to the adjacent villages or houses of relatives, while others move to the embankment or to the sides of high ways. Sometimes they move to the old chars (accreted land) or to the newly emerging char lands. These displaced people face acute problems of food and shelter. Most of them become wage labourers and a large number of them migrate to the urban areas in search of employment.

The landless people affected by riverbank erosion are the most wretched ones. They are the people who are most exposed to scarcity of food and famines. They are totally dispossessed and surrounded with plethora of problems. The problem of landlessness will move from and to worse unless it is dealt with seriously. Before taking policy decision in this regard adequate field level information on the nature and magnitude of the problems is a must. Therefore, the need for research in this field can not be overemphasized.

#### **d) Conclusion**

Riverbank erosion exacerbates the existing problem of impoverization in rural Bangladesh. In the study village of Nizbatia, for example, it was found that 59.52% of the households are landless. Whereas the national rate is 28.3%. The villagers had to sell 80% of their assets in order to survive. With their cultivable land lost in erosion they are forced to become wage labourers and do other odd jobs which pay very little as well as sell their assets in order to survive. River control, promotion of income generating activities,

using local resource and aptitude of the people and khas land allocation could work as suitable strategies to redress the sufferings of these people.

The problem of landlessness and pauperization created by river bank erosion has so far received no special attention of the policy makers and planners. The extent and dimension of the problem demands that a proper assessment of the problem should be made for making suitable policy measures. That traditional relief measure of doling out a few bags of wheat should not be the prescription. Rather a comprehensive and coherent policy based on a strategy of using local talents and materials for employment through support in the form of institution building, interest free credit and training should be undertaken in order to make the people self reliant. And at the same time permanent river control mechanisms should be worked out for a permanent solution to the problem. Until that is done the problem will go on compounding every year.

