Effect of *Monga* on the Livelihoods of Landless Rural People

M.H. Kabir[1], M.Z. Rahman[2] and M.A. Kashem[3]

Abstract

The purpose of the study were to identify the causes of *monga* as perceived by the landless rural people, to determine the effect of *monga* on different capitals of livelihood of landless rural people and to relate the effect of monga with their selected characteristics. Data were collected from a randomly selected 100 farmers from Sakhahati, Montola, Boilmondiarkhata and Koroiborshel chars of Chilmari union, Chilmari upazila under Kurigam district through interview during March and April, 2007. Most of the respondents had medium effect of *monga* on their livelihood. No or low scope of work in the lean period and unusual increase in prices of rice were perceived as the major causes of *monga* by the landless rural people. The relationships between the characteristics of farmers and the effect of monga were tested by computing the co-efficient of correlation. Family income, food security status and credit availability were found negatively correlated with the effect of *monga*.

Keywords: *Monga, landless, perception, livelihood.*

Introduction

The Northern Region of Bangladesh is situated in the Testa and Jamuna basin, and contains many tributaries of these. Topography and climate make the area ecologically vulnerable to destabilizing variations including floods, river erosion, drought spells, and cold waves, all of which occur more frequently and intensely than in other regions. Amidst these compelling conditions, the local economy shows little diversification and is heavily dependent on agriculture which yields only one or sometimes two annual harvests, in contrast with three crops per year in more fertile and benign parts of the country. In this setting, local employment is limited from September through December in average years. As the landless and poorest survive on agricultural wage labour, their opportunities and ensuing income drop in this period, and they become trapped in what is called *Monga* - a cyclical phenomenon of poverty and hunger (CARE, 2005).

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of *monga* on livelihood of landless rural people within the framework of sustainable livelihoods. *Monga*, being contextual to vulnerability of the livelihoods of landless rural people, might have influence

---
[1] Field Facilitator, SDVC Project, CARE Bangladesh, Naogaon Team Office, Naogaon, [2&3] Professors, Dept. of Agricultural Extension Education, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymesningh

on their livelihood asset endowments: human, natural, social, financial, physical. *Monga* situation emerges as a result of the trends, shocks and seasonality of vulnerability context and have a direct effect on people's asset status. It can also force people to abandon their home areas and dispose of assets prematurely. Government policy support with multilevel institutional initiatives and NGO interventions can best help people to cope with *monga* through facilitating their access to assets. Besides government and non-government interventions, livelihood maintenance activities have a reciprocal influence on the effect of *monga* of landless rural people.

As the intensity of *monga* increases and destroys the livelihood asset base, the scope of livelihood maintenance activities becomes narrowed. Inversely, the more the scope of performing maintenance activities, the more secure their livelihoods are. All these arguments give rise to the notion that the effect of *monga* is likely to reveal in status of and access to livelihood asset base as it is linked to and arises from livelihood asset base. However, people of different characteristics might experience differing effects of *monga* in their livelihoods. More precisely the behaviour and performance of individuals will ascertain the important relationships that determine the effect of *monga* on their livelihood.

However, the selected objectives of this study were to (a) identify the causes of *monga* as perceived by the landless rural people, (b) determine the effect of *monga* on different capitals of livelihood of landless rural people, and (c) relate the effect of monga and ten selected characteristics of the farmers.

Methodology

The study area was confined to Sakhahati, Montola, Boilmondiarkhata, Koroiborshel chars of Chilmari union of Chilmari upazila under Kurigram district. From Chilmari Development Information Centre (CDIC) under the governance of Grammen Communications, a sister concern of the Grammen Bank database an up-to-date list by July, 2006 of monga affected rural landless of Chilmari union was obtained name wise and it was 542. Among them 302 people live in the study area. Thirty three percent of the population (a total of 100) were selected randomly to make the sample. Ten personal characteristics of the respondents were selected as independent variables for the study.

Effect of monga on livelihood of the landless rural people was the dependent variable of the study. This variable was calculated based on the consequences of *monga* that results in livelihood asset base i.e. human, financial, social, natural and physical capital. Effect of *monga* on each capital was ascertained by checking their extent of effect in five selected statements. Each statement was measured by a five point rating scale. The response were: 'highly increased', 'increased', 'remained same', 'decreased' and 'highly decreased' and the weights were given as 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. Thus, the possible score for each capital could range from 5 to 25. The overall effect of *monga* on livelihood was simply calculated by summing up the scores of the aforesaid capitals. Therefore, the overall effect of *monga* could range from 25 to 125.

In the attempt of having knowledge about rural peoples perception about causes of *monga*, an open ended question was asked.

Data were collected from the sampled rural people by using structured interview schedule during March 26 to April 16, 2007.

Findings and Discussion

Profile of the Rural People Characteristics

The majority (73.0 percent) of the people fell in the middle aged category. Seventy four percent of the respondents in the study area were illiterate (Table 1). On the other hand, 21 percent of them had primary level academic qualification and 5 percent had secondary level education.

Table 1. Profile of the *monga* affected landless rural people (n = 100)

Selected characteristics	Scoring system	Score range		Land less rural people		Mean	SD
		Possible	Observed	Categories	%		
Age	Actual years	-	25-73	Young (upto 30)	14	41.9	9.26
				Middle (31-50)	73		
				Old (>50)	13		
Education	Years of schooling	-	0-8	Illiterate (0)	48	1.22	2.01
				Can sign only (0.5)	26		
				Primary (1-5)	21		
				Secondary (6-10)	5		
				Above secondary (>10)	0		
Family size	No. of members	-	1-8	Small (up to 4)	66	3.88	1.61
				Medium (5-6)	27		
				Large (>6)	7		
Family income	'000' Tk.	-	2.5-31	Low (up to 20.0)	94	11.79	5.68
				Medium (20.01-40.0)	6		
				High (>40.0)	0		
Family assets	'000' Tk.	-	0.48-15.3	Very low (up to 10)	93	3.88	3.61
				Low (10.01-20.0)	7		
				Moderate (20.01-40)	0		
				High (> 40)	0		
Food security status	Scale score	0-24	0-11	Less secured (0-8)	58	7.31	-0.27
				Moderately secured (9-16)	42		
				Highly secured (17-24)	0		
Scope of work in *monga* condition	Scale score	0-24	0-3	Less (0-8)	100	1.48	0.86
				Moderate (9-16)	0		
				High (17-24)	0		
Credit availability	'000' Tk.	-	0-16	No (0)	60	2.23	-0.28
				Small (0.01-5)	28		
				Medium (5.01-10.00)	5		
				High (> 10)	7		
Migratory behaviour	Scale score	1-16	1-16	Less frequently migrant (0-8)	79	4.17	4.18
				Moderate frequently migrant (9-12)	17		
				Frequently migrant (13-16)	4		
Perception about *monga* mitigation initiatives	Scale score	8-24	16-24	Unfavourable (0-8)	0	21.43	1.67
				Moderately favourable (9-16)	1		
				Favourable (17-24)	99		

Remoteness of the study area, poverty and unawareness of the people and lack of educational infrastructure might be the main reason. Majority (66 percent) of the respondents were found to have small family. The findings remind about Bangladesh paradox. Intervention of family planning brought better result in keeping family size small in the study area. Another reason might be that people compensated their proneness to hardships (*monga*, flood, etc.) separating them from elderly parents along with brothers and sisters. The highest proportion of the respondents (94 percent) had low family income. Ninety three percent of the respondents had very low family assets. People with low family income and living in a flood prone area cannot build-up much family assets as they were not secured in vulnerable flood condition. Near about three-fifths (58 percent) of the respondents had 'less secured' status of food. It was possibly because of the chronic poverty of the distress livelihoods and their remaining within the poverty trap. Hundred percent of the respondents had less scope of work. Majority of the respondents

(60 percent) were in the category of credit recipient. This may be due to provision less credit schemes of GOs and NGOs or the economic status of the poor prevented them to receive credit. Most of the respondents (79 percent) were found to be less frequently migrant. People of the northern region are homesick enough. More or less this attitude of people was the barrier for their migration. Almost all (99%) of the respondents had favorable perception on initiatives to mitigate *monga*, while one percent had moderately favorable perception. This was possibly because of the fact that the respondents were not so educated but experienced enough about different *monga* mitigation initiatives due to frequent exposure to them. Hence, they perceived positively.

Perception about causes of *Monga*
From the investigation it was observed that landless rural people's perception on causalities of *monga* dispersed on and around 10. The responses arranged in rank order are shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Ranking of the responses regarding causes of *monga*

Causes of *monga* as perceived by the landless rural people	% frequency	Rank order
No or low scope of work in the lean period	77	1
Increase in price of rice	74	2
Flood and river erosion	61	3
Weak service of the government	52	4
Landlessness of the inhabitants	40	5
Illiteracy of people	37	6
Inherited poverty and remaining within debt trap of the inhabitants	26	7
Lack of industries in the region	15	8
Disgrace of the Almighty	12	9
Remoteness from economically developed zone	4	10

From the above findings, it is evident that maximum appearance of frequency (77) went to "No to low scope of work in the lean period". *Monga* is a composite of several causes. Among which employment deficit, unusual price hike of price, flood and river

erosion are noticed in particular. It validates the existing literature that *monga* is a consequence of those causal factors which the rural mass perceived well. Islam (2005) found similar findings in his study.

Effect of *Monga* on different capitals of livelihood

The major variable of the study was the effect of *monga* on livelihood of landless rural people. In the study the effect was measured by computing the effect on five capital endowments of livelihood namely human, financial, social, natural and physical capital. For a clear understanding of the overall effect, a summery of findings in this regard has been presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Categorization of the respondents according to the effect of *monga* on different capitals

Capital endowments	Score range		Categories	Landless rural people (n = 100) %	Mean	SD
	Possible	Observed				
Human capital	5-25	16-25	Low (upto 19)	24	21.14	2.108
			Medium (20-22)	50		
			High (23-25)	26		
Financial capital	5-25	17-25	Low (upto 19)	31	20.7	1.88
			Medium (20-22)	56		
			High (23-25)	13		
Social capital	5-25	16-24	Low (upto 19)	78	18.67	1.90
			Medium (20-22)	15		
			High (23-25)	7		
Natural capital	5-25	15-23	Low (upto 19)	42	19.45	1.813
			Medium (20-22)	55		
			High (23-25)	3		
Physical capital	5-25	17-25	Low (upto 19)	16	21.62	1.81
			Medium (20-22)	50		
			High (23-25)	34		

Fifty percent of the respondents faced *monga* with medium effect on their human capital. Twenty six percent were found to face *monga* with high effect. The dominant feature of the finding was the prevalence of moderate to high effect on human capital of *monga* affected people. The distortion of human capital at varying degrees is quite logical as people have to starve for a certain period.

Majority (56 percent) of the respondents faced *monga* with medium effect on their financial capital. Thirty one percent were found facing *monga* with low effect. Thus, monga posed some sorts of moderate effect on financial capital. People being unskilled, illiterate, inefficient and traditionally agricultural day labourer could not earn enough. So the hardships of *monga* was an unmanageable fate for them.

Seventy eight percent of the respondents faced *monga* with low effect on their social capital. Fifteen percent were found facing *monga* with medium effect. Thus, the effects on social capitals of *monga* stricken landless rural people were low to medium. While there were not enough financial assets and only means of income (labour) remained idle, ethics were sent down the pages of Bible and the society was affected.

Majority of the respondents (55 percent) faced *monga* with medium effect on their natural capital and 42 percent were found facing *monga* with low effect. Therefore, from the findings we may conclude that *monga* poses medium effect on natural capital. Resources in such type of isolated pockets are scarce. So the effect would be low to medium is quite logical.

Fifty percent of the respondents faced monga with medium effect on their physical capital and 34 percent were found to be faced *monga* with high effect. The findings indicate that *monga*-hitted people generally have low physical assets. Therefore, the effect would be higher to a great extent is realistic.

Overall effect of *monga* on livelihood
Based on the *monga* effect scores the respondent categories are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Categorization of the respondents according to the effect of *monga* on livelihood

Score range		Categories	Landless rural people (n = 100) %	Mean	SD
Possible	Observed				
25-125	88-114	Low (upto95)	16	100.71	5.04
		Medium (96-110)	83		
		High (111-125)	1		

Data show that 83 percent of the respondents had medium effect of *monga* on their livelihood. Sixteen percent of them faced monga with low effect. Only 1 percent of the respondents faced monga with high effect. The result reflected that *monga* hits people most with medium severity. From the observation it is evident that people experiencing *monga* with high effect is not mentionable at all. People experiencing low effect is actually low. This means *monga* condition is now a moderate one and is improving. It is possibly because Bangladesh has been stepping towards development steadily from 1990s. In the mean time a considerable infrastructural changes had been taken place in *monga*-prone districts. Along with the growth of GDP people's income are also increased though prices of essentials go beyond their limit. Remembering the famine of 1974, GoB and different NGOs have been trying to ameliorate the *monga* problem. Different innovations were introduced for the well-being of *monga*-hitted people by those agencies. Recognizing *monga* as a prevailing issue GoB, added it to the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs). So, it is quite logical that the shock of *monga* is on diminishing trend. The study thus reveals out this finding.

Relationship between dependent and independent variables
Out of 10 independent variables only 3 variables i.e. family income, food security status and credit availability showed significant negative relationship with the effect of *monga* on their livelihood while the rest of the characteristics (7) did not show any significant relationship with the effect of monga (Table 5).

The relationship between family income of the respondents and the effect of *monga* on their livelihood was negatively significant. People with high family income have enough access to food at all the time whatever the market condition or incidence of natural catastrophes would be. So they have the opportunity to withstand against any kind of hardship.

Monga is therefore, unfamiliar to them. But the small income of the landless poor could not reduce their sufferings in *monga* period. It was then quite logical that there existed a negative significant relationship between family income and the effect of *monga*.

Table 5. Relationship between characteristics of landless rural people and the effect of *monga* on their livelihood

Independent variable	'r' values
Age	-0.056
Education	-0.171
Family size	0.025
Family income	-0.205*
Family assets	0.039
Food security status	-0.273*
Scope of work in *monga* condition	-0.082
Credit availability	-0.284*
Migratory behaviour	-0.007
Perception about *monga* mitigation initiatives	-0.131

* Significant at 0.05 level

Similarly, the relationship between food security status of the respondents and the effect of *monga* on their livelihood was negatively significant. It seems to be very reasonable because maximum of the people in the study area were facing insecurity of food. Therefore, the food status of them couldn't lessen their sufferings from hardships of *monga*, flood, etc. And people with higher food security were likely to be unfamiliar to *monga* as stated above. Therefore it gave rise to the notion that the more the insecurity of food, the more the prevalence of the sufferings of *monga*.

The relationship between credit availability of the respondents and the effect of *monga* on their livelihood was also negatively significant. It is evident that vulnerability context e.g. trends, shocks and seasonality have a direct effect on people's asset status whatever they have. *Monga* force people to dispose of their assets prematurely. Therefore credit availability can best help people to cope with *monga* and later recovery of their abandon assets. Therefore, the drawn negative significant relationship between credit availability and the effect of monga was quite logical.

Conclusions

On the basis of the findings and their logical interpretation the following conclusions were drawn:

- Seasonal unemployment, abrupt price fluctuation of rice, flood and river erosion were perceived to be vital causes of *monga*. Seasonal unemployment and abrupt price fluctuation of rice belong to the seasonality of vulnerability context. Prevalence of the shocks of flood and river erosion make the situation worst. All of these are likely to result in severe food insecurity in *monga*-prone areas.

- The study reveals that almost all the capitals of livelihood building blocks were affected by *monga*. The worst affected were human, physical and financial capital. And the overall effect of *monga* on livelihood was moderate. Yet, *monga* affects livelihood patterns of people in a bad way; it was evident that the shocks of *monga* were on repelling trend. People were found fighting back to rebuild their lives. They learned from the realities overtime and negotiated their way to emancipate and realize changes. *Monga* mitigation program launched by

both GOs and NGOs within Govt. policy framework may contribute to mitigate the sufferings of *monga* and give the way for resilience of their livelihoods.

- The findings of the study show that family income, food security status and credit availability had negative significant

relationships with the effect of *monga* on livelihood. This leads to the conclusion that improving family income, providing security of food at household level and microfinance can best help people to cope with *monga*.

References

CARE. 2005. *Monga in Northern Bangladesh*. Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Islam, M.N. 2005. Perception of the Farmers about Causes and Remedies of Monga in Kurigram District. *M.S. (Ag. Ext. Ed.) Thesis,* Dept. of Agricultural Extension Education, Bangladesh Agricultural University, Mymensingh.