

### **Empowering the Char Region People: A Tale of Jahanara**

Bangladesh – one of the world's most densely populated and poorest countries – undergoes from many disasters like floods, cyclones and tornadoes. Their rate of recurrence and cruelty is increasing, making some of Bangladesh's poorest rural communities even more at risk. The living example of this situation is around 40 million Bangladeshis live in extreme poverty - that indicates one quarter of the entire population is surviving on only 22 taka (1 USD= 69 taka) a day. These unnoticeable



people of our society are the victim of multifaceted attack of poverty surviving without having any available options- struggling to cope with food shortages, floods, droughts and lack of minimum social rights.

Young mother and Jamuna *char* (Small islands in the river) dweller, Jahanara is one of them who became totally lost with her children after her house was destroyed by the dreadful attack of river Jamuna in 2004. For about two months Jahanara survived under open sky at the embankment of river Rakhsha. In her own words, *"I was moved here to the embankment of the other side of the river with my children. Flood and river erosion destroys our houses and our belongings are also washed away every year"*.

Later on when she resettled in char Bakshoya village, her husband stopped coming back home at night from time to time. She survived in great difficulties to get just two handfuls of rice by working in other people's house as a maid servant and by digging soil. The challenges of living in amidst starvation and acute uncertainty made her life more pathetic. She elevated other people's plinth but her own habitat was remained under flood water. Afterward in 2007 her life became terribly uncertain because of the destructive attack of flood. Most of the people moved to other place but she and her neighbor continued to reside there in an awful uncertain situation.

In 2008 the DIPECHO IV project raised up the plinth of her homestead and she started to dream of a better future. By digging soil she earned 6,500 taka and bought duck, hen and goat. She kept rest of the money and stopped working as maid servant in other people's house. In 2008 during flood she earned 7,000 taka by selling poultry and livestock. Further more she earned 15,000 taka by cultivating vegetable on the high land.

Meanwhile she took credit from local organization and bought some livestock. Since her homestead is now raised up from the mainland she is not scared of overlapping water. In this rainy season she hopes to sale her existing domestic animals and will buy more after rainy season. This success demonstrates that she does not need to work as maid servant anymore. In the mean time her son has started working in a tea stall from there he earns monthly 600 taka. *"Now I can feel the change"* She explains.



Containing indifference but satisfactory look on her face, Jahanara, age 38, points to the Jamuna River and says, “*I used to utilize water for cooking and other house hold works by bringing water from that river everyday. But now I don’t need to go there*”. DIPECHO-IV project has installed a tube well and a toilet to her. Jahanara says, “*My sufferings will have no limits without this help.*” Jahanara’s story is the success of DIPECHO intervention that steers to motivate and empower the whole community of char Bakshoya village.

***Disclaimer:*** *This document has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Commission. The views expressed herein should not be taken, in any way, to reflect the official opinion of the European Commission.*

***For further information, contact:***

The Project Manager

DIPECHO V Project

ActionAid Bangladesh

Email: [shakeb.nabi@actionaid.org](mailto:shakeb.nabi@actionaid.org)

Website: [www.actionaidbangladesh.org](http://www.actionaidbangladesh.org) & [www.dipecho-bd.org](http://www.dipecho-bd.org)