

Food Bank- the Lifeline of Helpless in Crisis



SKS Foundation, in partnership with Oxfam in Bangladesh, implemented Resilience through Economic Empowerment Climate Adaptation Leadership & Learning (REECALL 2021) Project covering the vulnerable people in rural areas to make them more resilient to social, economic, and climate shocks and stress. Under REECALL 2021 Project, the traditional practice called “fist-rice” got credit as an effective tool to deal with the shortage of food in an emergency. To that idea, SKS Foundation and Oxfam have given a social shape and termed it “Food Bank” under the Asia Community Disaster Preparedness & Transformation (ACT) Project.

Concerning the climate shocks and stress, Gaibandha is known as a flood-prone *char* district of Bangladesh as three mighty rivers Brahmaputra, Jamuna and Teesta have crossed the district that triggers flood and river erosion over the years. The nearby low-lying areas such as Fulchhari and Saghata upazila of the district get flooded and face river erosion. This turns the lives & livelihoods of the community people leaving them in a vulnerable situation. So, the locality stays at some types of disasters round the year.

When disaster hits the locality, none but themselves are the very first to be and come on to help themselves before reaching outside help. And the Food Bank comes most handy to meet the foremost and topmost need ‘food’ for themselves. Concerning this, SKS Foundation has been promoting the Food Bank concept at the most disaster-prone areas. SKS consolidated the achievements & learning of the Food Bank concept while different stakeholders reiterated the replicable value of the Food Bank.



Dr. Atiur Rahman
Economist and Former Governor, Bangladesh Bank

“Over the years, Bangladesh has made significant progress in many sectors. However, we still lack disaster management as the number of catastrophes is scaling up day by day. In this context, it is optimistic that even marginalized people of the *char* region of Bangladesh have also emerged in the culture of doing something on their own. The people have taken a wonderful initiative, the initiative based on social capital, and emerged from the inner power of the society to build their destiny. From that point of view, Food Bank is a significant initiative, and I would define the Food Bank as a model from where the state and other institutions have lots to learn. It’s necessary to build such initiatives to stand on one’s own feet and assert one’s rights. The culture of collecting “fist-rice” and thereof

helping people has remained in our society and politics. The Father of the Nation, Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, also collected “fist-rice” at the beginning of his political life to pay the education cost of ordinary children. Herein, he used the power within our society itself. So, the spirit of self-help is rooted in our culture. We can build a self-reliant, inclusive, and sustainable society and economy if we can use the power that is existed within our society. In a difficult time, people wake up and get help. But, it cannot be a sustainable and permanent solution to the problem. The permanent solution to the problem is to build an institution to help people. And the institution must be built from and within the community. If the Food Bank stands as an institution, then it will be easier for other institutions to add their grant to help people systematically.”



Sadequr Rahman
ADC (General), Gaibandha

“The Food Bank is a groundbreaking concept. Before establishing the Food Bank, there were many problems such as borrowing at high-interest rates, assets sold at less price, etc in the poverty-stricken *char* areas. Higher dependency on traditional moneylenders bind them to fall into the vicious cycle of debt and poverty. It was the main problem. The Food Bank is not only useful at natural disasters, but also it was useful at other times and to meet others’ needs like education. So, it is an effective measure. Like Food Bank, fodder bank is also playing a vital role to meet the crisis of cow feed. Considering all these, we need to make more people aware and involve them in the food & fodder bank process. Helping poor people from food and fodder banks fall into social safety net program. Alongside government donations, other private institutions have to come forward to donate here to promote the idea.”



Prof. Dr. Ahmed Parvez
 Dean of the Faculty of Science and Disaster Management
 Patuakhali Science & Technology University

“Asking relief is begging. But overcoming hazards using own resources is called intelligence. It’s optimistic that people in disaster-prone areas are using their resources to overcome the hazards. Along with rice, as a product of Food Bank or banking, we need to focus on the other simple and common commodities of the respective communities available depending on the geographical or regional locations and conditions. For this, we need to study and find the way of diversified products and their value change and pick the right product for saving or food banking. The Food Bank concept can also be considered to make up one’s loss along with other products. For example, there is a 6-month drought in Sudan and no crop is harvested during this time. But in the previous season, people produce a lot of ladies’ fingers that they dry, make powder and preserve for the lean season. In the drought session, people mix this powder with water and eat to survive.”



Most. Yarun Begum
 President of CBO Alliance
 Fulchhari, Gaibandha

“As a community person and beneficiary of the Food Bank, I have witnessed and experienced the enormous suffering of people before and after a flood. Here, in my home district Gaibandha, which is one of the most flood-raged areas, we constantly face disasters; flood, river erosion, drought, cold waves, one after another. As a consequence of these calamities, foremost, we face a tremendous food crisis. That time, we would have sold egg-laying hens or a nice goat at cheaper rates to meet our daily food. Even we would have sold our other valuable assets to combat our food crisis. The food crisis would get worsening when there was no Food Bank. At this time, there is no work. We let the Food Banks others lend, not as borrowing. Not only we the members, but others also get benefit from this Food Bank.”

The Food Bank



Baharam Khan
 Project Coordinator- REECALL 2021, SKS Foundation

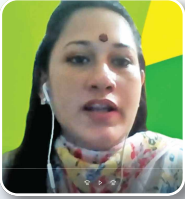
Northern Bangladesh faces disasters like flood, river erosion, etc in every monsoon as a huge area of this part is charland due to the crisscrossed the mighty rivers. This disastrous situation devastates the lives of farmers, fishermen, and other poor & vulnerable groups. Being rooted in this zone, SKS Foundation deals to combat this phenomenon by mobilizing & supporting the disadvantaged based on their experiences & learning. Concerning this, SKS Foundation has facilitated and promoted one of the traditional practices called “fist-rice” in the disaster-prone char communities to meet the need for food in any crisis. It is called “Food Bank”. The Food Bank has been adopted by the community people themselves to meet the food crisis during the disaster. Centering the Food Bank, the local people are encouraged “to save something for the future” in the greater need of them in disaster.

Rice, a conventional and available product in every household of the local areas, was opted to save as something. The difference between the traditional fist-rice storing and now the “Food Bank” is to store and manage the small-amount rice collectively over individually in a common store of community in greater need of the whole community.

The Food Bank idea has come with the help of marginalized people who run out of both food and money in the context of disaster. With a primary view of dealing with the food crisis, community people particularly women keep aside fist-rice and store in Food Bank in normal times, get back when they need or allow others in exchange of getting back.

Being more vulnerable to ill-timed floods and river erosion, and fed up with unmet promises of aid, a group of women made a plan: set aside a handful of rice from every meal and save it for their crisis period. As the months went by, they found plenty of rice to keep hunger at bay during any emergency. So, from a little rice and a lot of solidarity, the women came up building a Food Bank. Physically, the Food Bank consists of a shed, a storage bin, a ledger book, and a set of scales. The women deposit rice when they’re flush, and when they must, they take it out again. Borrowing food or money in desperate times is nothing new to these families; what’s new is that now they pay no interest on the loans. The Food Bank is for no one’s benefit but their own. Under the Asia Community Disaster Preparedness & Transformation (ACT) Project, SKS Foundation has covered the most disaster-prone 15 villages of Fulchhari and Saghata upazila, Gaibandha where 442 flood-distressed families are directly getting benefits of Food Bank storing and getting the benefit of their rice or money during an emergency.





Kazi Rabeya Amy
Rural Manager,
Oxfam in Bangladesh

“The Food Bank concept has been taken from the ancient rural tradition of “fist-rice”. Centering the intervention of the Asia Community Disaster Preparedness & Transformation (ACT) Project, SKS Foundation & other partners have promoted the concept from family to the community at the local level as a collective effort. So, the Food Bank concept has come up as one of the community initiatives that existed in our rural areas and the custom of depositing “fist-rice” was under our household mothers to take the precaution for a future emergency.”



SM Biplob Islam
District Correspondent
Boishakhi Television, Gaibandha

“As a journalist, I have interviewed the community people and observed that the Food Bank has played a pivotal role to meet the food crisis during disasters, and lessen the dependency on traditional moneylenders. Now, the people who had to wait for help from outside are no longer waiting for help or selling their valuable livestock or assets to meet their needs during disasters. In the light of this experience, it’s necessary to introduce the ‘Food Bank’ concept to all the flood-affected areas where the lives and livelihoods of the community people become vulnerable at regular intervals.”



Md. Abu Hanif
Executive Director,
Center for Social Development (CSD), Kurigram

“Roumari, Chilmari, and *Char* Rajibpur upazila of Kurigram district are riverine areas wherein the habitants suffer during disaster. In contrast to the problems, there are opportunities as huge lands are lying abandoned in the *char* areas that could be added along with the Food Bank and also with fodder bank concept. Like fist-rice, fish can be a common commodity since fishes become abundant here during floods.”



Jahid Hasan
Member Secretary,
National Char Alliance

“Aside from natural disasters, ‘Food Bank’ can also work well during man-made disasters like price hike of household commodities when the poor struggle to meet their daily needs. So, Food Bank is a good initiative that can help in all crises. Along with rice, as an available product at the *char* areas, *Khas* or absentee, and barren lands in the *char* can be utilized in need of *char* people.”



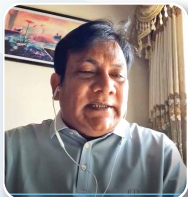
Krishibid Munir Hossain
Project Coordinator- REECALL 2021,
Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK)

“We work at Roumari and *Char* Rajibpur upazila of Kurigram district. We have 35 Food & Fodder Banks, and accumulated about 17 lac taka at those banks. We have noticed a new practice that poor people are helped to buy and arrange family and social functions like marriage ceremony with support of their Food Bank. What they had worried about food in crisis, that has been eradicated with support of Food Bank.”



Kamal Uddin
Director, Friendship

“I think Food Bank is an excellent and useful climate-adaptive idea for the flood and drought-affected people at the *chars*. From all sides, the idea of the Food Bank and also the fodder bank in feeding the distressed people and their livestock at the *char* is good and optimistic news for us.”



Rasel Ahmed Liton
Chief Executive,
SKS Foundation

“This is one of the good initiatives therein we can stand by the poor people with. There was uniqueness in the initiative accompanied by challenges as well.

By overcoming some of the challenges, we have come forward to take more steps and make an example. Now, our work is to connect this innovation, the Food Bank, to local and national policy-makers to get the best impact from the practice. Not only flood but also COVID-19 distress has shown us the different patterns and forms of disaster, which can last long and ruin all of our existing systems. So, we need to focus on the community-based and sustainable solution to the problem to save people in disaster. The true strength of the initiative is that the helpless people in time of crisis get their food problem solved by the Food Bank generated and managed by themselves.”



Joseph Halder
Director, Advocacy & Communication,
SKS Foundation

“The reality appears that *char* land is someone else's land, and the lives of a *char* are the lives of someone else's. Floods come and go, and everything is changed, but the *char* people's life and sufferings remain the same. In this context, the good news is that the *char* people are coming up and overcoming their challenges by themselves. Forming the Food Bank is such a community-generated initiative to save the people in crisis. Now, formal recognition and institutionalization of the Food Bank are needed to cover more distressed people in an indigenous manner. And it's our responsibility to promote the Food Bank as a viable development concept to help the vulnerable community save themselves on the wise use of their limited resources.”



Learning points:

1. Food Bank is an effective tool to deal with any type of crisis. It needs recognition and turning it into an institution can systematically help community people in crisis.
2. The true Human rights can be established helping the community stand themselves by their own inner strength than waiting for others' help. To stand by own, Food Bank can be a model to make a self-reliant community.

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