

Padma Bridge and Livelihood Sustainability of the Launch Workers: A Study Among Launch Workers in Mawa and Kathalbari Ghat

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ABSTRACT

Padma multipurpose bridge, one of the most challenging tasks in the history of bridge construction, has alters the previous launch communication. Launch communication is involved with thousands of launch workers and their livelihood sustainability. It is quite sure that the launch workers have lost their previous occupation but most of the respondents mentioned that they are optimistic about the current situation will provide them some extra facilities for finding their new source of income. Many government and non-government organizations has already started their activity in the surrounding area of Padma bridge. Moreover, industries will transfer their organizations to the southern part of the country, and this will broaden earning facility for the launch works in industrial sector. This study discovered the livelihood sustainability of launch workers and their everyday challenges to adjust with the new mode of communication. At the same time, the researcher also explored the economic and social prospects of Padma Bridge for the launch workers. The research followed a survey (N=102) for collecting quantitative data from Mawa and Kathalbari Ghat. Besides survey, case studies, were also applied to document launch workers' livelihood sustainability from the workers and some key informant's respondents. Following the findings, this study recommended some need-based policies to minimize the livelihood vulnerability of the launch workers.

Keywords: Padma Bridge, coping mechanism, Launch worker, Bangladesh.

INTRODUCTION

Padma Bridge is the largest bridge in the Ganges-Brahmaputra-Meghna River basins in terms of both span and total length is the most challenging construction project in the history of the southwestern parts of Bangladesh because the mighty river Padma is one of the prominent rivers that carries huge water. As a result, the riverbank erosion rate is very high. Moreover, the layer of soil under the water is very risky for such a giant construction. This study primarily focuses on the coping capacities of the launch workers in adopting with Padma Multipurpose Bridge project which highlights the socio-economic implications among the launch workers. This study upholds the fact that due to the development of roads and highway communication, connection through the river channel has been drastically changed which will impact the total livelihood confrontation system of launch workers as well as the people living in surrounding areas of the Padma Bridge.

Padma Bridge is a dream and a crying need for the people of the southern part of Bengal for many years. It will strengthen the communication system between the southern parts of the country to the capital city center. At the same time, it enhances industrial development and spatial development of southern regions.

Besides this, it will also alter the launch communication system that is involved with thousands of people and their livelihood who are mainly the launch worker. This research reveals the social reality that due to

labor migration total livelihood of the launch workers will be vulnerable to cope with the changing situation, especially in their living standard, child education, land settlement, health, social relationships, economic status, and so on. Furthermore, it may also be able to produce some new income-generating activities. Above all, there will be some positive and negative sides of Padma Bridge communication depending on its social impact on the riverside residents involved with launch communication. But instead of every difficulty it will be treated as a blessing and will disclose a golden door of development for the country in the upcoming future.

REVIEW OF LITERATURES

Islam (2012) studied the Padma Bridge and its opportunity and challenges for char-land livelihoods sustainability in char-Janajat. But in this study, there was no attempt to understand the livelihood sustainability of launch workers, though they had to cope with the change of their previous profession. In the current study, researcher tried her best to understand the problems of launch workers and livelihood sustainability.

Selim Raihan, a professor of economics in Dhaka University conducted a study on the economic impact of Padma Bridge in 2010, mentioned that Bangladesh's economy would expand by 0.33 per cent to 1.26 per cent annually and that of the southwestern region by 1.66 per cent to 2.3 per cent thanks to the bridge. This study intended to justify the economic benefit that Padma bridge can bring for the overall development of the country. But the researcher ignores the mass population and their livelihood sustainability. For fulfilling the knowledge gap and to explore the condition of launch workers is the focus of the researcher.

The business standards report on June 2, 2023, also mentioned that most of the industrialist and investors in the country think about shifting their organization to the southern parts of Bengal. This task also provides work opportunity for the common people, and this will secure their livelihood to some extent. In the current study, researcher aimed to understand deeply the livelihood sustainability of the launch workers.

The Financial Express report on June 2, 2023 showed that, Zahid Hossain, economist at the World Bank, report on Padma bridge, with the opening of road and rail traffic to the Padma Bridge, people in the country's south-western part will begin to benefit from the bridge immediately. By road, the distance between Dhaka and many others the south-western districts will be reduced to at least 100 km. Apart from that, reducing the time and cost of transporting passengers and goods, vehicle maintenance and fuel costs will be much lower. As a result, people from all sectors, including business and agriculture, will benefit because the country's GDP will increase rapidly. In this report, there is an overall explanation of economic benefit due to the increase of gross domestic product, but as a specific unit launch workers and their livelihood sustainability is overlooked. For filling the gap, the researcher explores the livelihood sustainability of the launch workers of Mawa and Kathalbari ghat.

Regional Industrial Revolution

This is for sure that, Padma Bridge will significantly improve the economy of the country's south-west region, for example, Bangabandhu Bridge, around which an industrial revolution has taken place in North Bengal. It changes the economy of North Bengal because of this bridge have contributed about 2% to the GDP growth of Bangladesh. Such contribution has also been estimated in the case of Padma multipurpose Bridge. Experts of the respective fields believe that many small and big industries will be growing in the south-western part of the country along the Padma Bridgeroute, including manufacturing businesses, RMG, assembling plants, storage facilities. All these facilities may contribute to the livelihood sustainability of the launch workers.

Additionally, the ship breaking industry, RMG, assembling plant, and storage facilities will be set up in this region because Padma bridge makes transportation of goods easier and lessen the production cost to a great extent. According to a BSIC source, 500 to 1000 factories of the different sectors will be set up in 6 districts of the Barisal division in the next ten years. According to a report by Dhaka Tribune, if demand for gas, electricity, internet, and infrastructure in the south-west can be met, trade between India, Nepal, and Bhutan with Bangladesh through the region will increase. As a result, the economic landscape of the south-west will change to a great extent. All these facilities may create livelihood sustainability of the launch workers.

In terms of Padma Bridge, the launch workers are the most vulnerable people because they had to lose their profession and at the same time had to adapt with the new situation. For the above-mentioned reasons it is a crucial side to investigate, and the researcher intended to explore the situation. Due to insufficient previous research articles or literature on the specific study topic, the researcher had to rely on empirical data collected from the respondents through face-to-face surveys, some case studies, and so on. Moreover, the researcher also used her observation power (objectively) to understand the actual scenario. The researcher aspires that this study finding will be a milestone for further investigation about the fact for the future researcher.

Theoretical framework

Dr Norman Garmezy, the founder of resilience theory, mentioned that our life is never perfect. There will be difficulties and we must overcome those difficulties. Main argument of resilience theory is that the nature of the adversity is not important, but how we deal with it is more important. There is a very close link between the main argument of the theory and the adaptation or livelihood sustainability of the launch workers. The nature of their problem that is joblessness is not important. The more important thing is that how they can manage to cope with the situation.

Aaron Beck (1960) developed cognitive behavior theory. The main argument of this theory is that, if it is possible to change the way a person thinks about something, then it will be possible to change the way they interpret the world around them. This theory is applicable to understand the thinking of launch workers about their livelihood sustainability. Most of the respondents, claimed that they are hopeful about their livelihood sustainability in another sector. They also mentioned that the Padma bridge is opening a golden door for development of the whole country. Among the respondents most of them are positive about the developmental phenomena of Padma bridge.

Richard Ryan, left and Edward Deci, conveyed the Self-Determination theory.

Self-determination refers to a person's ability to make life choices and manage their own life in their own way. Padma bridge opens the door of immense possibility of alternative work opportunity. In the past, the launch workers must work as launch workers because in that time any other facilities of work were not present in that locality. But now the situation is opposite, they can choose their own from a greater variety work. They can determine their own job in terms of their capabilities.

Objectives of the study:

1. To know the socio-economic status of the launch workers.
2. To understand livelihood sustainability of the launch workers.
3. To examine the challenges and prospects of Padma bridge, faced by the launch workers.
4. To suggest some policy recommendations.

Research questions:

1. What is the socio-economic status of the launch worker?

2. How are they adapting with livelihood sustainability?
3. What are the challenges they faced in terms of livelihood sustainability?

METHODOLOGY

For completing this research Kathalbari and Mawa Launch Ghat have been selected as study area. The selection of study area is mostly purposive because most of the launch workers lived around the two-study locale. For attaining greater validity and reliability of the research findings researcher used both qualitative and quantitative method for data collection. Researcher intends to use both quantitative and qualitative techniques because, separately quantitative technique has some limitations and weakness related with quantitative data the same is true for qualitative one. Using simple random sampling sample was collected. For quantitative method there were n=102 survey respondents. Researcher used some close ended question and some open-ended question to structure a questioner for survey. Highest level of objectivity was maintained to collect the quantitative data. Researchers write the description of findings of quantitative data objectively. On the other hand, for collecting qualitative data case studies of six respondents were taken by using checklist. This paper is primarily based on empirical data gathered through direct interviewing with the purposively chosen launch-workers from the study areas. Observation methods were also used for better understanding of the empirical situation. Focus group discussions (FGDs) were used for exploring the hidden treasure from the respondents about their livelihood sustainability. In this research all the respondents were male. For attaining expected level of validity and reliability of data, researcher accept 5% level of significations. For data processing and analysis SPSS software was used by the researcher. Though it was a self-funded research project, due to lack of adequate budget and time constraints, shortage of necessary research assistant, researcher had to choose a small sample size for both quantitative and qualitative data. Moreover, this study finding will be fuller if the whole launch worker community were the sample for the study. Above all ethical guidelines for sociological research were followed by the researcher during data collection process. Additionally, during the data collection period the researcher did not cause any harm to the environment and the animal kingdom.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Socio economic and Demographic profile of the respondents:

Among the respondents mixed age categories were found. Most of the respondent was in the 31 to 40 age category and the number was 55 persons. The second largest age category was 21 to 30 and the number of respondents in this category was 29 persons. Most of the respondents were Muslim and members of the nuclear family. Although there were followers of other religions and different family structures.

Among the respondents, there were a variety of income, in terms of their job responsibility. Some of them earn more than thirty thousand per month, but the number of respondents was not so large. Most of the respondents earned ten thousand per month. They spend most of their income on daily necessities. Some of them send their children to school but many of them cannot afford to do that. Moreover, sometimes they had to borrow money from relatives and money lenders to maintain the daily demand. Among the respondents, 98 percent mentioned that they don't have any savings. Only 1.96 percent of respondents mentioned that they save around twenty thousand per month.

Most of the respondents 53% lived in a house made of mud and CIS. Only 18% of respondents claimed that their house is made of bricks. Moreover, nearly 8% of respondents mentioned that their home is made of wooden floors and a CIS roof. Apart from that their sanitation condition was not so good. A very little number of the respondent used the sanitary toilet, and the number was below 25%. The rest of the respondents used either kacha or adhakacha toilets (68%). Nearly 7% of respondents use open space for completing their nature's call.

Among the respondents most of them rare poultry and livestock resources for boosting their income. Nearly 46% of respondents claimed that they had chicken, duck, goat, etc. Nearly 20% of respondents mentioned that they have pigeons and chicken. Only 2% of respondents mentioned that they did not have any livestock assets.

Prospects of Padma Bridge:

Among the respondents, most of them were hopeful about the prospects of the Padma bridge. Nearly 70% of respondents claimed that it will be a great opportunity for the people of southern parts of Bengal. In terms of goods and human transportation, this bridge will be a blessing without any doubt. Moreover, many industrialists shift their business center from the capital to the southern parts. As a result, new sources of employment will be available. Besides that, many institutions are rising in the surrounding areas. Many of the launch workers can find employment in these organizations according to their qualifications.

Employment vulnerability, and key challenges

Padma Bridge creates some facilities at the same time it also generates some threats or challenges for the launch workers. Among the respondents, 65.60 percent argued that this communication makes them jobless as the previous launch communication will be dying. The second majority mentioned that this change in communication generates their livelihood crisis because their former income-generating activities will be no more. Among the respondents, 01.96 percent claimed that their income rate will be low. Many of them had to change their profession, and even they must change their residence. Some of them mentioned that they don't have any agricultural land in the village, and they must totally depend on governmental support for rehabilitation or for new income source.

Among the respondents, 33% argued that they had to depend on agriculture to cope with joblessness. Another 20% had to change their occupation because they don't have that much agricultural land. Some of them had to grab seasonal work opportunities to maintain their family. Many of them determined their career to factory work or daily wage earner category. Only 5% thought that they shift their work to small and medium enterprise businesses. Apart from that there were some respondents who claimed that they don't have any means of subsistence, they had to depend on government aid or any other rehabilitation project of government and non-government organizations.

DISCUSSION

As major findings, literature review direct that Padma bridge will accelerate the economic growth rapidly and creates job opportunity for many people, most of the respondent in this study recognize that this will be a great chance for them to work in a diverse field. Moreover, this development demands structural development as well in this locality.

Shihab, (28 years old) is a very young energetic person. He is serving as a launch worker for more than 12 years. Though he started his career very early right now he is more stable in this profession. But, after the inauguration of Padma Bridge Shihab is going through a trouble some situation. After losing his previous occupation currently he is working as a day laborer around the Padma Bridge locality. But there is no security of income because sometimes he finds work but not every time. Shihab has a nuclear family consisting of 4 members. One of his children has started to go to school. He used to live in a house made of wood and CIS and used semi-concrete toilet. While continuing in his past career he earned around twelve thousand takas per month. With this amount of money, he meetup his daily necessities including his child's education. After meeting family expenditures there was nothing as savings. But right now, meeting daily demands is a big challenge for him due to in availability of income. Moreover, he used rare poultry cattle to

boost his family's income. Now he is planning to migrate to a new profession and income security. Shihab claimed that different government and non-government organizations should take necessary steps to support the whole launch worker community. For resettlement and income security, this may be a great initiative. Moreover, Padma bridge will also render work opportunity for the mass people.

Another vocal respondent in this study was Mokbul Mia (70 years old). Through the process of time, he gathered huge experience from his profession and from the entire world. Very spontaneously he mentioned that he is the eyewitness of many ups and downs in this sector, and many changes occurred in front of his eyes. Moreover, Mokbul claimed that today or tomorrow this shift (from launch communication to by-road communication) was inevitable. This for sure generates new opportunities for the people of the southern part of Bengal from different sides. Firstly, the time of communication will be reduced massively, industrialization will expand in the southern part of Bengal, living standards of people in this zone will increase. Apart from that communication with Mongla Port will be wonderful and this will strengthen foreign trade. Though there are many positive sides to Padma Bridge it has some negative sides also.

“We have lost our means of living. Including me, there are many launch workers who don't know what to do now for maintaining our family. Because we have passed our active working age and at this stage shifting to new profession is challenging. Moreover, we have passed our entire life on this soil, so I hope that government takes the necessary steps for our resettlement in income-generating activities”.

‘Padma bridge is a blessing for the people of Bangladesh’ claiming that Topon (45 years old) started his conversation. He has an extended family and most adult people in his family are involved with income-generating activities. He himself is working as a master of a launch. As a result, his family's monthly income is high in terms of other launch workers. Though he has lost his profession he is quite hopeful to find a new job in the same locality. The condition of his house, and toilet is good because of his family's monthly income. Topon claimed that there are many launch workers who have low monthly income, and they cannot afford to meet daily demand. In this case, some rehabilitation projects need to be launched by government and non-government organizations. “Moreover, more work opportunity is knocking at the door, because Padma bridge is creating immense work opening.”

Nazrul (54 years old) “appreciates the changing communication system from launch communication to road communication.” He served in this sector for more than 30 years. Nazrul mentioned that “through the process of change readjustment process is very important.” “Padma Bridge is a blessing for the people of Bangladesh. It accelerates economic growth and improves the communication system rapidly.” He argued that he must find his new profession in a new sector. He has cultivable land in his village. As a result, he decided to return to his village and started cultivation as his new profession.

CONCLUDING REMARKS AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Structural change demands readjustment from the local settlers for their everyday necessity which ranges from earning activity to education, household living, treatment facility and so on. Padma Bridge is a landmark in the history of bridge construction. This change of communication at the same time conveys blessings for the people of the southern part of Bengal in terms of speedy communication for both goods and people on the other side it needs readjustment of living of the launch worker of Mawa and Kathalbari point. Though, primarily launch workers had to face challenges to cope with the changing situation, but it can be said that this difficulty will be overcome soon when the fuller development of different organizations in the locality will be taken place. These organizations will provide work opportunities for the local people. As a result, the current difficult situation of launch workers will be no more. Moreover, different government and non-government organizations will consider the fact of launch workers and will take necessary measures to lessen their misery.

Some supporting organizations can be developed to assist launch workers, to earn their living. The rehabilitation project proposal needs to be considered. Replacement of labor from Mawaand Kathalbari Ghat needs to be considered to the labor-intensive sector.

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