



LEDARS Newsletter

Tiger widows issue,

Year 7,

Volume 3,

July 2010

Editorial

'Tiger widow' is probably one of least discussed term in the media, but it is one of those terms that haunt the people living in the villages bordering the Sundarbans Forest reserve. Tiger widow is a term given to all women who have lost their husband to a tiger attack while they are at work. Every village situated near the forest has many such widows trying to eke a meager living after the husband's loss. The letter's prime intention is to throw enough light on the unspoken and often ignored lives of the Tiger widows in the Sundarbans of Bangladesh, and the alarming rate at which the number is increasing.

Tiger Widows – A hidden issue in the Sundarbans

At the mouth of the river Ganges and Brahmaputra, the 10,000 square km Sundarbans delta shared by India and Bangladesh is home to a population is home to 600 odd Royal Bengal tigers. It is not well known around the world that there are also five million people living in the Sundarbans. The lack of a sustainable infrastructure has left the men of the delta with no choice but to venture into the forest to make a living by fishing, honey collecting or wood gathering. In this process, the men often come in contact with the royal Bengal tigers, also termed 'man-eaters' for its propensity to seek human meat. Every year close to 100 people lose their lives to the Tigers in the Sundarbans. This large number of recurring deaths has left more that thousand 'Tiger widows' and their children to fend for themselves. In most of the cases, Predominantly, with men being the main earning members of the family, the widows and their kids are pushed into destitution after the men's death.

The increasing number of 'Tiger widows' in the fishing community has created many superstitious beliefs among the fishing community. The women usually take up the role of a widow while their husbands are away for work in the Sundarbans forest. The women are asked to follow a regimented way of life which includes- not using soaps or shampoos for bathing; not cooking any meal during the day time (mid day); not wearing the vermillion on their forehead (among the Hindu community); not cleaning the floors of the house (during mid day); (see page 2)

Seminar on rights of tiger widows in the Sundarbans impact zone of Bangladesh

On the 7th June 2010 LEDARS and Citizen Alliance of Coastal Environment Conservation jointly organized a seminar on rights for tiger widows in the Sundarbans impact zone of Bangladesh. The seminar was moderated by Mr. Khalid Hossain, Chief, Rupayan (NGO). Chief Guest of the seminar was Mrs. Taslima Khatun Sanda, Public Prosecutor of Women and Child protected Tribunal, judge court, Khulna. Other panel members of the seminar include Mr. Depbaprosad Sarker, ED LoCOJ and Mrs. Sarbanu Khatun, Widows leader.

Mr. Mohon Kumar Mondal, ED, LEDARS presented a seminar paper on the plight of the Tiger widows in the Sundarbans region. There were presentations from other members on the related issue by Mr. Nisith Ranjan Mondal, UP member Moharajpur union, Koyra, Khulna, Mr. Palash Rahaman, student, khulna university, Mr. Sahabuddin Morol and forest resource user.

(See Page 4)



Tiger Widows – A hidden issue (After page one)

not talking to any male members of the community and many more. They believe that failing to follow any of these restrictions would kill the husband in the forest.

Thus, adding to their misery, some widows become a sign of misfortune in the villages and in their in-law's house, as they are pointed at as the reason for their husband's death. There are even times when the widows are ill-treated by the husband's families owing to the above mentioned reason. Some widows depend on their parents for any further living and many end up alone with their children to take care of their daily needs.



"The number meals that we take have reduced after my husband's death. There are days when my two year old child eats only one meal for a day" says Fatema, widow from the Nildumur village of Sathkira, Bangladesh. Almost every widow's story is the same as Fatema's. Devoid of familial support, they don't receive any form of support from the government as well. The forest resource users from the villages have to pay a certain amount to the government for gaining permission to use the resources of the forest. However there are no relief to the families that have lost the sole breadwinner to the tigers. There are no compensations offered to the families by the Bangladesh government after a forest user is killed while at work. There are hardly any jobs for the women to take up in the villages. All that is left for them in the end is misery and more of it.

Until now the widows were almost completely deprived of any social help. It has to be mentioned that there are some allowances from the Government for the widows, on paper. However, the corrupt route that the meager funds are sent through has deprived the widows the possibility of living a life alone. The lack of unity among the widows in the community is another reason for them not being able to make a protest against these wretched happenings that rule their life. In fact some are not even in a position to be aware of the allowances offered.

It would not be complete if there were no mention about the children of the widows. Most of the families have a minimum of 2 children and sometimes it there are 4 children that are left under the widow's care. The children are never spared too. Sometimes they go through the same level of mistreatment in the community. Often this level of treatment carries into the doors of the school classrooms, as they cannot afford to wear clean clothes. This makes many children to stay away from the school and they try to make a living through small income generating labour activities in the places, provided they are accepted into the workplace. Once the children reach a certain age, the children in turn take up jobs as forest resource user as it is the only way they can make a life on their own. And the cycle of the same events continues. Such is the life of the widows here in Sundarbans, Bangladesh.

The number of people getting killed by the Tigers is increasing at an appalling rate. In the Gabura union of the Bangladesh there were 6 fishermen killed by tigers in the last month alone. Gabura is just one tiny part of the villages living by the forest. The last 2 months has seen more than 30 deaths in the villages in Bangladesh. These records are from the field study conducted by the NGO LEDARS. The data released by the forest department is always very less and most of the deaths just go unrecorded. In the last ten years there have been close to 500 deaths by tiger attacks in the Bangladesh coastal region. However the forest department's data shows only 100 odd deaths. This is the extent to which the fishermen in the Sundarbans region are ignored. Thus this issue has hardly come to the fore in the media.

There are about fifty million people dependant on the forest for a living. Most of the children start helping their father at a very young age of 10 to collect resources from the forest. There seems to be no solution to this problem in the coastal villages of Bangladesh. Every married woman in the community is living with the fear of becoming a widow any day. This story of these widows is true to every word and it continues to be. There are fishermen and widows born into the fishing communities everyday. The only way to prevent these deaths is to create sustainable income generating jobs in the villages, and the number of such jobs is literally close to none.



We would like to welcome your valuable opinion. Please send your opinion by email: info@ledars.org



LEDARS' Initiatives

LEDARS is an NGO based in the Sathkira district of Bangladesh, one of the main organisation trying to help these widows and mitigate this shocking way of life. LEDARS has been the foremost advocates of this less known issue of 'Tiger widows' on a national and international media for the last two years. We have brought in many national and international journalists to spread the story of these

widows and the widows to be. The most important success story so far is forcing the government to form a law in 2010 to provide compensation for the families after a person's death by tiger attack.

This new law would be implemented in reality very soon. Apart from this LEDARS has established a pre-primary level school primarily for the children of the Tiger widows. The objective is to mainstream these children slowly into the government schools, thus keeping them away from the entering the forest right from a young age. In the past year, many Self Help groups were formed involving 180 widows so far, in an attempt to mobilize the widows and develop their skills for alternative income generating activities. Overall, this is a start of one of the most important projects LEDARS has taken up and believes to ensure livelihood security for all the widows in the years to come.

TV talk show on Boishakhi TV.

Last 7 April 10.05pm and 2.05 pm at 8 April 2009 Boishakhi TV broadcast a talk show at "Challenge to Change". 2 representatives from Niagara Volunteer for Bangladesh attained that program. The talk show highlighted the problems of tiger widows and widow's demand to the national.

A telefilm broad castled at ATN Bangla

Mr. Sahidul Alam Tutul make a telefilm named "Bagh Bidhaba" and this film broadcasted at ATN Bangla TV channel at 4.40 pm of 24 September and 9.30 am 26 September 2009. LEDARS convince Mr. Alam to highlight the lifestyle of the tiger widows by his art work. He took the case study from us. We assist his to conduct shouting and everything.

A documentary film produced on tiger victim's widows

LEDARS produce a short documentary film which name is "A story of Ashia". The duration of the documentary film is 10 minute and 55 second. This documentation held on the history or life style of tiger victim widows in the Sunderban impact zone. It has swoon at 14 December 2009 at Copenhagen Climate Change Summit.

Sarbanu highlighted the issue internationally

Sarbanu is a chairperson of our tiger victim self-help group which name is 'Durjoy Nary Unnayan Sangathon' She attend many international meeting, seminar, rally etc. She attained "International Parliamentary conference on climate change: countdown to Copenhagen" 5 - 11 July 2009. Climate Change Meeting in Thailand and UNFCC meeting in Copenhagen at 7-18 December 2009 with the support of OXFAM, GB. We give her nomination when OXFAM ask a climate victim.

Government will give priority to tiger widows for distributing kash land.

57 Applications of permanent settlement from widows submitted to the Assistant Commissioner of land Shyamnagar. In addition, last 21 January, 2010 LEDARS organized a roundtable in Sathkira on land rights of Widows. Additional Deputy Commissioner of Sakhira was the chief guest of the roundtable. National level media representative, civil society high level government officials, national and international NGO representatives attend there and they aware about the tiger victims widows and there problems. Regarding Kashland distribution, honorable ADC mention that they will distribute the Khasland to the tiger victim widows basis of the priority.

Tiger widows meet with Mr. Saikh Siraj

The tiger victims widows issue has got attention to popular TV channel Channel I. This year Mr. Saikh Siraj shouts his Krishoker Eid Ananda in Shyamnagar. He gave emphasis to the tiger widows in his most popular magazine program. He included an event specially for the tiger widows. Besides this he personally interested to work with the tiger victims widows. He told me that Channel I and LEDARS will organized an event in Dhaka to draw attention of the donor and media.



Nigar Sultana representative from AAB delivering her speech



LEDARS Mr. Saikh Siraj shaking his hand with widows.

Seminar on rights of tiger widows (after first page)

The seminar's prime intention was to throw enough light on the issues of the wretched life of Tiger widows in the villages adjacent to the Sundarbans wildlife reserve and the alarming rate at which the number is increasing. Tiger widow is a term given to all women who have lost their husband to a tiger attack while they are at work. The forest resource users from the villages have to pay a certain amount to the government for using the resources of the forest. However there are no relief to the families that have lost the sole breadwinner to the tigers. There are no compensations offered to the families by the government after a forest user is killed while at work. The widows are just left by themselves to make a living and take care of their children after the husband's death. Adding to their misery some widows become a sign of misfortune in the villages and at their in-law's house and are never allowed into their homes. There are even times when the widows get tortured mentally and physically by the husband's families. All that is left for them in the end is misery and more of it.



Audience of the seminar

Until now the widows were almost completely deprived of any social help. It has to be mentioned that there are some allowances from the Government for the widows, on paper. However, the corrupt route that the meager funds are sent through has deprived the widows the possibility of living a life alone. The lack of unity among the widows in the community is another reason for them not being able to make a protest against these wretched happenings that rule their life. In fact some are not even in a position to be aware of the allowances offered.

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"We didn't know that such large number of tiger widows are living in the villages of Sundarbans in such undignified conditions." said Mrs. Taslima Khatun Sanda, the chief guest of the seminar. Mrs. Sanda responded with undying anger that "I think most of us are fighting against injustice on women. It is illegal and injustice to allow such treatment to widows. At whatever cost, we will fight against it; we will go to the street in need for demanding the rights of the widows."

There were also humble requests from the panel members asking LEDARS to work for rights of all the widows in and around the villages adjacent to Sundarbans. LEDARS has already taken the path that leads to the rights for these under privileged widows. They have established a pre-primary school mainly for the children of the widows. The objective is to mainstream these children slowly into the government schools, thus keeping them away from the forest. On the 1st July 2010 LEDARS, under the presence of some civil society leaders, local elected members and NGO representatives, distributed school uniforms for all the children of the widows ensuring a level of dignity for them among the community. This is just a good start for a long journey that is ahead of LEDARS and many other NGOs in search of the rights for the Widows of Sundarbans.

Highlights of next issue

The coming issue our newsletter focus the tiger human interaction in the Sundarbans area including How many tiger killed by bitten in the village, How many people were dyed by tiger attack, hot spot of tiger attack, number of tiger widows, climate change and Sundarbans, etc.

So please your eyes on our next issue.

Editor: Mohon Kumar Mondal

Editorial Board:

Karthik Subramonium
Ranajit Mondal
Pijus Kanti Baulia Pintu
Sabina Yesmin

Published By:

Local Environment Development and Agricultural Research Society
LEDARS,
Head Office:
Village: Munshigonj, Post Office: Kadamtala,
Upazila Shyamnagar, District: Satkhira, Post Code: 9455, Bangladesh.
Telephone: +8801713462821, E-mail: ledars_bd@yahoo.com
www.ledars.org

