

**Shahid Mallick**

# River, Culture and Livelihoods: Water Pollution and Social Change Around the River Bangshi, Bangladesh

Water pollution and social change

**Master's Thesis**

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# **River, Culture and Livelihoods: Water Pollution and Social Change Around the River Bangshi, Bangladesh**

A dissertation

Submitted to the department of Applied Community Change  
and Conservation at Future Generations Graduate School  
In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Masters of Arts

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## **Executive Summary**

Water is key to human survival, development progressions and success. However, the current trends of destruction of global fresh water source is alarming for sustainable development. The water use conflicts among different actors i.e. agriculture, industry and urbanization and pollution of surface/river water due to industrialization and other anthropogenic causes are too high in developing country.

The 238 kilometer long Bangshi River is one of the important tributaries of the Barhamaputra-Jamuna river system in Bangladesh and main common property resource for local people particularly those of Ghughudia. The Bangshi River is being threatened because of EPZ (a special economic zone with huge tax subsidies and many other facilities to attract foreign investors) and pollution of other local industries.

The concern in this study is to understand and explain how industrialization and its pollution to rivers induce social change and affects the environment, ecology and livelihoods around the River Bangshi.

Two broad questions were asked and discussed 1) What are the perceptions of different actors in regards to water pollution; and 2) How can they be mobilized to reclaim the rights of the common people. The grounded theory approach and qualitative methods i.e. focus group discussions (FGD), in-depth individual interview and descriptive survey were conducted. In total of 47 people were involved, not counting three FGD. Among those 30 are from the Ghughudia village and rest are outside village. The representative stakeholders groups; fishing, farmer, small business, Goala/milkman and students are from Ghughudia and the owners of industry or their representatives, government officials, political leaders, media and civil society groups are from outside Ghughudia village.

The EPZ and other industries create 350 additional employment for women in the village but make jobless 170 traditional fishing families. Pollution in the river reduced

access in common property resources, affected traditional livelihoods opportunity. Increased ground water demand and decrease of agriculture land and productivity. Twenty eight (93 percent) people at Ghughudia village (n =30) had a believed, EPZ/industry polluted the Banghai River. For community mobilization every stakeholders had to be involved in every stage and cycle of activities and issue base research is to be done. Twenty four (51 percent) people of all respondent groups (n=47) had a thought to sustained community mobilization, government have bigger role in the form of governance and impartial to implementation and execution of existing law and enforcement.

The attitude of much profit or profit by any means of the industry owners and none existence or not use of ETP is the main cause of river/water pollution. The culture of impunity, lack of awareness, political biasness and corruptions by the government and private sectors complex the situations further.

Industrialization is related with economic growth of community and economic empowerment of individual but the pollution of water has cyclic effect on other local natural resources and ecological niches at local level and also on traditional livelihoods opportunities. Use of polluted water in the paddy field causes for reduced yield production and change in agriculture pattern at Ghughudia village. Demolish of other water dependence and aquatic resources, prevent migratory birds to sit on the river Bangshi. Absence of fish in the river create, cultural distortion and unemployment for traditional fishing people and disempowered their women family members.

Different stakeholder in the community has their individual and community interest and also has some commonness. Therefore, valuing of differences and communalities of various groups, most of the sensitiveness to degradation of their local common property resources and other livelihoods dependencies are important to highlight in

community mobilization. Its also need to linked in top down, bottom up and outside/expert consultation (form of 3 way partnership) for just and lasting change.

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