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Forecast of more sea storms exacerbates fishermen's woes

Friday, June 20, 2008

By Jan Khaskheli

Karachi

The fishermen of the scattered localities near the former port town of Keti Bunder spend a miserable existence. Half naked children are seen busy playing under the salty water streaming near their makeshift homes. Women dry trash fish at their waterlogged courtyards in order to cook the day's meal. Disheartened males look inactive at a nearby embankment, gossiping with each other, as the rough season and a prediction of more sea storms have forced them to stay out of their jobs.

Some of them were witnessed repairing their fishing nets at their courtyards. Fisherwomen were looking strangely at visitors from their little holes of their makeshift homes. All this was witnessed by The News during a special visit of the journalists arranged by the World Wide Fund for Nature (WWF).

Presently, catching crabs is the only alternate source of livelihood left for the community. Each man earns amounts ranging from Rs50 to Rs150 daily through catching crabs. These people have a particular iron stick to hunt crabs in the mud. Salim Dablo, a local broker of crabs, purchases crabs from his community and sells it to the traders, says, "The cost of a bigger crab in the local market reduces from Rs100 in the winter to only Rs20 to Rs25 in the summer. Each person catches four to six crabs daily to run their families." Hashim Dablo, another fisherman, looked fed up because of the price hikes and asks, "How can some body manage to run his little family through a meager salary of Rs80?"

All the people—both male and female—were wandering bare foot there; they said it is the season of high tides and the area around their homes will remain watery for three months (June till August). After the forecast of developing cyclones and disasters by the government authorities they have anchored their small and medium sized boats near their courtyards to keep them safe.

Looking from the embankment built around the ruined port town, the makeshift homes located at a small distance are seen inundated by seawater. These are not island hamlets but the sea intrusion has engulfed them. More than 1.2 million acres have come under sea water till date as 1.5 ft erosion is reported daily. People travel by boats from the inundated localities and come to the town. Some of them go to the local market for buying kitchen items while others buy water containers from private water tanks, situated at the embankment.

It seems that they have become used to this tough life. They are most vulnerable to the disasters as after the rapid climate change, several studies have marked the entire 1,050km Pakistan coast, especially the Thatta district, as a disaster-prone area.

Hassan Dablo, 70, recalls, "It seems that now the land is slipping downward. Long ago two-foot muddy embankments were sufficient to keep our abodes safe from high tides but now they engulf even five to six feet embankments. Several families have built separate muddy walls for protection. If some one has to visit their relatives, they have to cross knee-high seawater."

Moreover, there is no school in these inundated villages. The few conscious parents send their kids to nearby town's school. Old graveyards have also been engulfed by sea intrusion, hence the community people take the bodies to graveyards, located at long distances at safe areas.

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