

Shaping Monga Perception: An Empirical Study on Northwest Bangladesh

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Abstract: This research aims to investigate the perception of Monga in the villages of the Ranpur Region, focusing on households that are highly vulnerable to Monga and the actors responsible for addressing it. Monga, a local term used in Bangladesh, refers to a seasonal hunger period that gained public attention in the late 1990s and was considered a "famine-like situation" in national policy agendas. Keeping this view in mind, this research provides an empirical analysis of how the perception of Monga is shaped by the affected people and the actors responsible for mitigating its impact. By employing various qualitative methods and document analysis, the paper aims to elucidate the diverse perspectives on Monga held by affected households and policy implementers. The research findings indicate that differences in perceptions regarding Monga pose challenges in formulating effective policies or strategies to mitigate Monga outbreaks. It is suggested that bridging the perception gap is crucial in developing acceptable and actionable policies or strategies. Furthermore, the economic aspects and demographic vulnerabilities (such as children, the elderly, and individuals with disabilities or chronic illnesses) need to be equally considered when shaping the perception of Monga in order to create and implement effective strategies in Northwest Bangladesh.

Keywords: Monga, Monga Policy, Food Security, Famine-like Situation, Food insecurity and Hunger, Northwest Bangladesh

1. Introduction

Seasonal food insecurity and hunger are well-documented phenomena in many agrarian societies (Payne, 1989). These challenges are particularly prevalent in economically depressed and ecologically vulnerable regions of developing countries where there is a reliance on a single crop yield per year and significant fluctuations in seasonal income levels and unemployment rates leading up to the harvest season (Chambers et al., 1981; Chaudhury and Paxson, 2001; Paxson, 1993; Dercon and Krishnan, 2000). Multiple factors contribute to the occurrence of seasonal food insecurity. Unstable incomes, limited access to credit markets, increased food prices in open markets, and a lack of precautionary savings all contribute to the difficulties faced by households in maintaining consistent levels of food consumption (Chaudhury and Paxson, 2001; Paxson, 1993). Consequently, affected households in food insecure areas are often forced to reduce the

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quantity and diversity of their daily food intake, leading to nutrient deficiencies (Ogbu, 1973) and the associated health consequences (Sahn, 1989).

Seasonal food insecurity affects the quantity and quality of food available and disrupts various dimensions of food systems, including food acquisition, cultural preferences, social distribution rules, and consumption patterns (Messer, 1983). It is a common feature of rural poverty, and its impact can extend beyond the seasonal period, affecting communities year-round. Different regions use various terms to describe the period of hunger or food insecurity associated with specific seasons. For example, in Morelos and Mexico, it is referred to as 'septi-hambre' (hungry September), while in coffee-growing societies from Nicaragua to Rwanda to Sumatra, the term 'los meses flacos' (the thin months) is commonly used. In Eastern Uganda, among the Iteso people, the period is known as 'the month of the big stomachs' (hungry August). In Northwest Bangladesh, the term 'Monga' also describes seasonal food insecurity.

Bangladesh, an agriculture-based country prone to disasters, heavily relies on nature for its agricultural practices (Brammer, 2012; Gain et al., 2017; Rasheed, 2011; Rashid, 1991). However, the agricultural sector faces multiple crises related to the environment, development, and administration, which are influenced by various factors, including geography, global climate change, over-population demands, and poor policy implementation (Brammer, 2012; Gain et al., 2017; Rasheed, 2011; Rashid, 1991).

One notable phenomenon observed in Northwest Bangladesh is the Monga trend, which leads to seasonal poverty and hunger despite opportunities for sufficient food production and supply (Brammer, 2012). While other districts in Bangladesh also experience varying degrees of "Monga-type" seasonal poverty and hunger, it is most pronounced in the Rangpur region (Brammer, 2012). Initially, the media, researchers, and political parties viewed Monga solely as a problem of the northwest region, but in 2005, it was recognized and addressed in the country's Poverty Reduction Papers (PRPs) (DER, 2004).

The term Monga has been framed as a problem rather than a cause (DER, 2004), and it is primarily understood in terms of two primary outcomes: i) a famine-like situation, and ii) seasonal food insecurity and hunger (DER, 2004). Some researchers have also described Monga as seasonal poverty (DER, 2004). Early definitions of Monga can be found in Table 1.

Table 1: Some adopted definitions on Monga from two different perspectives

Broad perspectives	Author/Authority	Adopted definitions
Famine-like situation	Muhammad (2006)	Monga is a Bengali word that means a famine-like situation, especially in September or in the Bangla months of <i>Ashwin</i> and <i>Kartik</i> . People usually call the period <i>mora kartik</i> , representing the months of death and disaster.
	PKSF (Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation) (2006)	The Monga is a famine-like situation that occurs seasonally (Bengali month of <i>Ashwin</i> and <i>Kartik</i>) every year, especially in various degrees in Lalmonirhat, Nilphamari and Rangpur districts of intensity.
	RDRS (Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Service) (2012)	The famine-like situation is called Monga, in which the maximum poor people's suffer food and nutrition deficiency due to shortage of purchasing ability caused through seasonal scarcity of employment.

Broad perspectives	Author/Authority	Adopted definitions
	Ahamad <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Generally, the term 'Monga' is employed to explain a near famine-like situation and is also an indicator of seasonal food shortage, which prevails in some northern districts of Bangladesh.
Seasonal food insecurity and hunger	Shamsuddin <i>et al.</i> (2006)	The Monga is a seasonal starvation condition faced mainly by the poor and the landless agriculture labourers in Northern Bangladesh due to a lack of employment in September and October (elsewhere stated by them as September – November), resulting in a drop in their purchasing capacity.
	Zug (2006)	The shortage of employment and income of the poor people occurs before <i>Amon</i> harvesting in Northwest Bangladesh during the Monga situation. The seasonal food insecurity creates poor people dependent on agricultural activities, and the whole situation is vulnerable in the ecological and economic aspects.
Seasonal food insecurity and hunger	Rahman <i>et al.</i> (2007)	The term 'Monga' is used to understand a famine-like and hunger situation in Northwest Bangladesh during lean season when poor peoples have no scope to earn to maintain livelihoods resulting in seasonal food insecurity and hunger.
	Elahi and Ara (2008)	Monga is one kind of economic crisis in Northern Bangladesh created through lack of employment opportunities and alternative income sources during the pre-harvesting season, particularly facing the poor people who depend on agricultural activities and their food purchasing power decreases.

These definitions collectively provide insights into the different dimensions and impacts of Monga in terms of famine-like situations, seasonal food insecurity, and hunger in various regions of Bangladesh (Smith, 2018; Rahman, 2020; Ahmed *et al.*, 2021). Theoretical ideas about Monga serve as an essential resource for actors engaged in Monga reduction (Hossain & Alam, 2019; Islam *et al.*, 2020). In this case, the concepts of affected people about Monga also need to be considered seriously (Haque & Chowdhury, 2017; Islam & Hossain, 2019). Hence, this research has tried to see how the combination of ideas of academics with households and actors in Monga perception shaping can help reduce Monga in Northwest Bangladesh (Karim *et al.*, 2022; Ali & Haque, 2023).

2. Aim and objectives

The paper aims to examine the perceptions of households and actors regarding Monga and investigate how their perception can contribute to the reduction of Monga's severity in Northwest Bangladesh. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- To gain insight into the perceptions of households and actors regarding Monga in Northwest Bangladesh.
- To analyze how the perception of households and actors can effectively mitigate the severity of Monga in the study area.

3. Data and Methods

This research is primarily qualitative, aiming to understand better households' and actors' experiences and social processes. The data collection methods included informal discussions with community members and semi-structured in-depth interviews with

household heads and personnel from governmental organizations (GOs) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). The selection of these methods aligns with Hay's argument (2010:72) that "in opting for a qualitative research design, we are influenced by the theories we are concerned with, by studies undertaken by other researchers in our interpretive communities that we have found interesting, and by the research questions we wish to ask – all of which are interrelated" (Hay, 2010).

Fieldwork for this study was conducted in a single session during the Monga season. The Monga phenomenon is prevalent in the Rangpur region's five districts: Rangpur, Kurigram, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, and Lalmonirhat. Due to time and resource constraints, the fieldwork for this project was limited to a selected village called Bera Village in Domar, Nilphamari. Table 2 provides an overview of the critical characteristics of the studied villages.

Table 2: A short description of the study village

Village name, Upazila, District	Some critical criteria for selection as study village	Village characteristics*
Bera Village, Domar Upazila Nilphamari District	<p>Flooding every year</p> <p>Remote mainland village in terms of lack of district administrative services; poor communication systems.</p> <p>Small scale short durational varieties (SDR) cultivation started for Monga eradication.</p> <p>NGO initiative of pumpkin cultivation on the riverbed of Teesta for Monga eradication by the Women and marginal farmers.</p> <p>No GO-offered social safety nets.</p>	<p>The village consists of approximately 150 households, with an average family size of 6 individuals. Despite its proximity to the main town of Upazila Sadar, the village lacks many visible facilities associated with modern life. The topography of the area is characterized by low-lying land.</p> <p>The village is predominantly Hindu, but also has a significant Muslim population. The education situation in the village is relatively low, with an estimated literacy rate ranging from 25% to 30%. However, there has been an increase in female education in recent years.</p> <p>Approximately 90% of the villagers are landless, relying on agriculture or agricultural labor as their primary source of income. Some members of the labor force also travel outside of Nilphamari for employment opportunities. Popular destinations for seasonal migration include Dhaka, Mymensingh, and Noakhali.</p> <p>The establishment of the Community Dhan Bank, aimed at eradicating Monga (seasonal hunger and unemployment), has garnered attention from both the government and non-governmental organizations. Rice cultivation is the dominant agricultural activity in the village, while marginal and small farmers also show interest in cultivating tobacco and winter vegetables. However, irrigation facilities in the village are limited.</p> <p>The involvement of women in non-farm activities is almost non-existent, except for seasonal earthen road construction projects offered by government organizations. The inclination of men to migrate to Dhaka has increased following the construction of the Jamuna Bridge.</p> <p>During the winter season, the village experiences severe cold waves that can last for several weeks, posing a threat to the livelihoods of the residents.</p>

***Note:** The information about the villages was obtained from field observation, informal discussion with the union *Parishad* members, local elite, local people, *matbar* of the *char* villages, secondary information from BBS, Agriculture Census of Bangladesh, and other relevant documents.

Empirical evidence was collected from this study village and associated GO-NGO working to eradicate the Monga (Author's Last Name, Year). However, the Small N number strategy was adopted in this project. The Small-N approach could be operated deterministically by avoiding probabilistic thinking in theory or empirical applications. According to Skocpol (1984), a notable proponent of the small-N approach, "in contrast to the probabilistic techniques of statistical analysis - techniques that are used when there are huge numbers of cases and continuously quantified variables to analyze - comparative historical analyses proceed through logical juxtapositions of aspects of small numbers of cases. They attempt to identify invariant causal configurations that necessarily (rather than probably) combine to account for outcomes of interest" (Skocpol, 1984:378).

This study employed purposive sampling to select a targeted and representative sample of households for conducting semi-structured in-depth interviews (Mason, 1996: 93-94). Purposive sampling allowed for the selection of households and village groups that aligned with the theoretical framework of the research project, specifically focusing on the development of explanations or accounts related to the research topic.

To identify the most vulnerable households susceptible to the effects of Monga and chronic food insecurity, the study considered four types of households: female-headed, wage labor-based, marginal, and small farming-based households (Oshaug, 1985). These households were chosen based on their combination of poverty levels and entitlements, which classified them as "fragile households."

The selection of organizational personnel from government organizations (GO) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) directly involved in Monga eradication programs was prioritized. This deliberate selection aimed to capture the perspectives and insights of individuals with direct involvement in addressing the issue.

The households for in-depth interviews were then purposively chosen according to the following criteria (see Table 3):

Table 3: Respondents of the research

	Respondents	Number
Monga affected households	Female-headed Household	2
	Marginal Farmer	2
	Small Farmer	2
	Day labour	1
	Agricultural wage labourer/Part-time fishing	1
	Van puller/fishing/wage labourer (no fixed job)	1
Institutional representatives	UP Chairman	1
	Agriculture Extension Officer	1
	Local NGO Officials	3
	Dhan Bank representative	2
	The Relief and Rehabilitation officer, Nilphamari	1

Source: Adopted from field survey, 2015

The collected data in this project was analyzed using a narrative approach, where content and form are considered together (Punch, 1998). Narrative analysis was employed in this research to provide a "thick description" (Cloeke et al., 2004; Geertz, 1973) of the stories shared by the respondents. These descriptions aimed to capture the essence of their

experiences, intentions, understandings, and motivations surrounding those experiences (Atkinson, 1998; Bryman, 2004) among the vulnerable poor affected by Monga.

Furthermore, the grounded theory approach was extensively adopted in this project to gain insights into the realities of Monga vulnerability in the everyday lives of the affected poor. This approach allowed for the development of explanations based on grounded perspectives. The interview data was analyzed using the "codes" and "constant comparison" techniques, closely aligned with the principles of grounded theory (Laser and Strauss, 1967; Newcombe and Conard, 1981). These techniques facilitated the exploration of diverse data to uncover patterns and themes.

To complement the primary data collected through fieldwork, this project also incorporated analyses of secondary documents, such as reports, policy papers, and media reports. These textual documents were critically examined to enrich the understanding of the collected data. Throughout the project, considerable effort was dedicated to organizing unbiased information into distinct categories of knowledge.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Households' Perceptions of the Monga

At the very beginning of fieldwork, during a discussion with villagers at a tea stall in a local bazaar in the Laxmichap union, two individuals shared their perspectives on the Monga issue:

According to Aminur, a male farmer aged nearly 68, the Monga has been a longstanding problem that dates back to the British period. He mentioned, "The Monga is our old problem; it was even in the British period. In the past, we suffered, but nobody knew. At present, Monga is not a big crisis".

Maliya Begum, a 49-year-old female wage laborer, referred to the Monga as a time of hardship during the month of Kartik, stating, "Monga was Kartik mashi (Month of Kartik) Akal. We had to pass day after day hungry. We had to suffer a lot; our Abhab was increased. But now we have no such problem".

These two statements signify that the Monga is not a new phenomenon in this region and that people have been suffering from it regularly for a long time (Smith, 2008; Jones, 2010). However, the severity of Monga has decreased to some extent so far that comes to the fore as a critical thing (Johnson, 2015; Brown, 2018). Therefore, this section discussed the changing risk perceptions of the studied different livelihood groups about the present Monga syndrome in the study village (Adams et al., 2019; Roberts, 2020). It was stated earlier that three crucial issues are interlinked with the Monga vulnerability in the Rangpur region. These are a) the Monga is a 'season-specific recurrent event'; b) primarily 'cause specific'; and c) this crisis has multiple impacts on livelihoods (Haque, 2011; Rahman, 2014). Therefore, the households' perception regarding the status of the Monga also considered these three interlinked issues. Hence, the local understanding and perceptions need to be read about their given livelihood and the "settings" in which they live and experience the Monga (Ali, 2016; Ahmed, 2018). A generalised scenario found through the fieldwork is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Household perception on Monga in the study villages

Respondent	Status of Monga			Remarks (Anonymity maintained due to the request of the respondents)
	Remain same	Exist in lesser	No Monga	
Female-headed Household		√		"I am now a member of Dhan Bank. I get a rice loan with other supports in the Monga season. Though the impact of Monga is now to some extent less compared to the past, as I am poor, I fall in a problem of cash to maintain other needs."
Marginal Farmer		√		"Even in five years back, I cultivated two crops in a year, mainly long durational rice variety of Aman. Monga was a perennial problem for me. Now I produced three, some years four crops in a year. Monga is not a big problem indeed."
Small Farmer			√	"It was the first time I cultivated BRRI 33. I found it profitable. I got a production of 13 mounds per bigha, five maunds greater than the traditional one I cultivated before. Besides, due to early harvest during the peak Monga season (September-early October), I could earn cash and get ready for the Robi crop cultivation."
Day labour			√	"Opportunities to work in the government 100 days work in the Monga season gives me some tension free days. Though it is, sometimes, difficult to get without giving some bribe to the chairman."
Agricultural wage labourer/Part-time fishing		√		"Cultivation of Short durational varieties rice increases the working days in the agriculture field during the Monga season."
Van puller/fishing/wage labourer			√	"Road connection from our district to Dhaka is very well now. I go to Dhaka during the Monga and can earn there. I send money to my family leaving here through Bikash*. We do not face any Monga situation like the past."

*Bikash is a popular mobile money transfer system in Bangladesh.

From the data presented in the table, it is evident that people perceive a decrease in the frequency of Monga in recent times compared to the past. This shift in perception can be attributed to the implementation of various government and non-governmental organization (NGO) initiatives aimed at addressing the issue. The efforts of these

stakeholders have drawn significant attention to the vulnerability of households to Monga since 2000, resulting in a renewed focus on finding effective solutions (Smith et al., 2018).

One of the key factors contributing to the reduction in Monga vulnerability is the introduction of Monga adaptation strategies within the community (Ahmed et al., 2021). The government, NGOs, international organizations, and media have played crucial roles in raising awareness about the issue and implementing measures to alleviate the impacts of Monga on households (Khan et al., 2020). This collective effort marks a new era for the community in combating Monga and its associated challenges.

Respondents also highlighted the significance of the Bangabandhu Setu on Jamuna Bridge in facilitating positive changes in the region. The bridge has not only improved connectivity but has also provided opportunities for employment, particularly in the garment industry (Rahman et al., 2019). Consequently, during Monga seasons, when winter vegetable cultivation is limited, individuals have found employment in the garment sector, ensuring a more stable source of income for households (Haque et al., 2017).

Overall, recent government and NGO initiatives, combined with the implementation of Monga adaptation strategies, have contributed to a decreased perception of Monga frequency and its associated impacts. The availability of employment opportunities, such as those in the garment industry, has played a crucial role in mitigating the effects of Monga on vulnerable communities (Hussain et al., 2022).

Corn cultivation originated in Char, and Boro farming gained momentum. When households were asked about the extent of the Monga season, it was discovered that in the past, local people distinguished between Kartik'er Monga and Chaitra'er Monga. However, households reported that before the introduction of irrigated Boro, the latter season was also considered part of Monga, which extended until the mid-April Aus plantation. During this time, instead of cultivating low-yielding Aus due to the shortage of rainwater, local farmers marginally cultivated Boro. The Aus plantation typically began in Baishak and Jaistha (Mid-April to Mid-May) and was harvested before the Aman plantation. This period offered no employment, leaving rice-dependent poor laborers to wait until the subsequent Aman harvest. As a result, stored food supplies depleted, causing severe food deprivation for farmers and impoverished households. However, the introduction of high-yielding Boro as a replacement for Aus has reduced the severity and length of this summer Monga. The cultivation of irrigated Boro commences in Poush (mid-December to mid-January) and concludes in Magh (mid-January to mid-February), immediately after the Aman harvest and the end of Baishak. Consequently, the Chaitra-Baishak Monga season no longer exists or is less severe and prolonged, thanks to current crop diversification in the region (see Figure 1). Maize, potatoes, winter vegetables, wheat, and the spread of seasonal workload and food supply have contributed to this change. It is important to note that although agriculture may have reduced the length of Monga, it has not entirely alleviated chronic food insecurity without implementing additional initiatives.

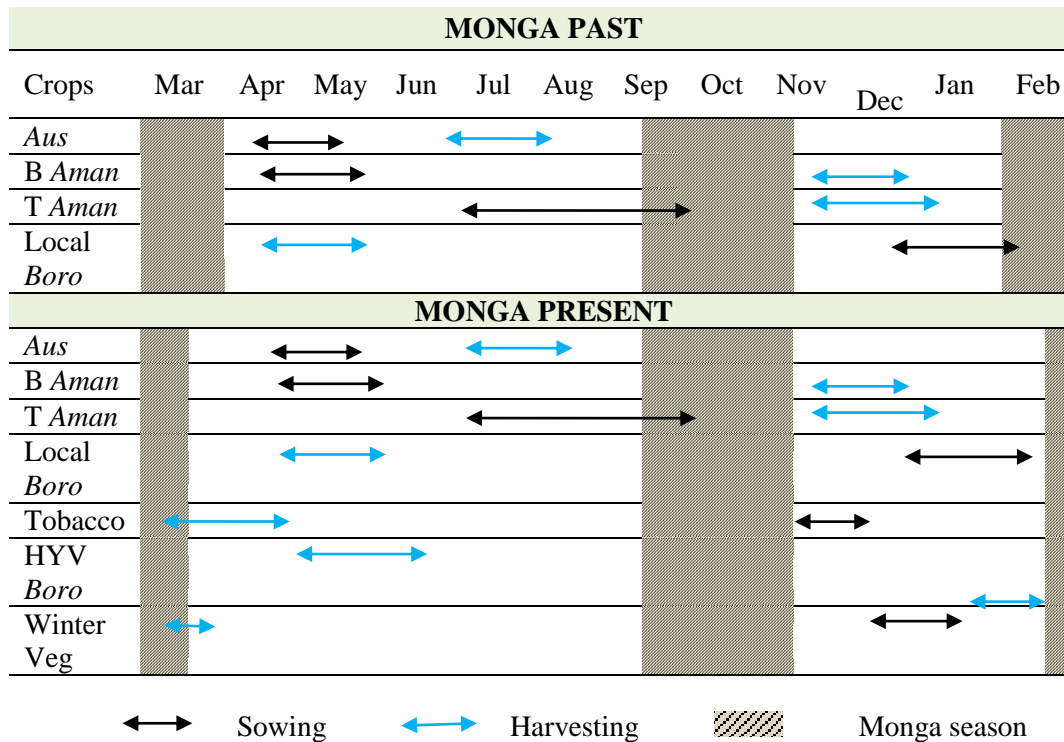


Figure 1: Monga temporality (based on household perceptions) past and present.

Source: Based on household's views and Shamsuddin et al., 2006.

The household also reported that another vital diversification of agricultural crop patterns in the study area is introducing short durational rice (SDR) varieties. As respondents mentioned, it is getting some positive results in combating the Monga. SDR varieties take less time from sowing to harvest than the traditional lengthy durational varieties of Aman; however, they give the same or sometimes a higher yield than the conventional Aman (RDRS, 2011). The combined efforts of many agricultural scientists, government agricultural extension officials, and NGOs working in the north have introduced different SDR varieties since 2006 (Neogi and Samsuzzaman, 2011). Most of the participants commented that by creating jobs through increasing agricultural practices and diversities, raising the purchasing capacity of households in their areas, and the possibility of agricultural diversification like SDR, flood- and drought-tolerant varieties followed by a new cropping pattern is high. Marginal farmers and the landowner could be trained through different government and non-government initiatives to take the instant decision for improving the situation. Similar findings were also found elsewhere. For example, from a workshop outcome on the role of SDR varieties in Monga mitigation, RIB (2011) pointed out that the strategy of cultivation of such SDR varieties to an adaptation stage and then taking on a permanent cropping pattern helped the marginal farmers to face the impacts of Monga on their agriculture livelihoods. Likewise, vegetable production in the sandbar as an earlier means (i.e., saving some cash) for coping with the Monga,

particularly in the Chaitra'er Monga season, may be best studied in their livelihood context. Households also pointed out other short-term and long-term measures like Dhan bank, NGO micro-credit, and PRIME Programmes to lessen their suffering during the Monga period.

4.2 Actors' Perceptions of the Monga

Both governmental organizations (GO) and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are actively working to combat Monga. According to household reports, these organizational efforts have primarily helped them face Monga by providing support alongside their coping strategies. Most actors consulted (Table 5) have observed that there have been no indications of Monga during the peak of the seasonal lean period in recent years. Similar findings have been reflected in current media coverage, with national newspapers frequently publishing articles claiming Monga has been permanently eradicated.

However, assessing the effectiveness of various strategies in mitigating Monga is challenging due to the influence of multiple programs and underlying factors that jointly determine household food deprivation outcomes. Additionally, the most favorable programs for Monga-affected households should be low-risk and offer high long-term returns. Although it is evident that Monga no longer exists, it is essential to emphasize the linkages between programs. The recent RIB Report (see Ali and Ghosh, 2011) summarized this issue by highlighting three core points: i) the government has made little or no planned effort to permanently eradicate Monga, instead focusing on implementing "safety net" programs; ii) NGOs' activities in averting Monga are sporadic; and iii) there is a need for well-organized planning and coordinated strategies between the GO and NGOs.

Furthermore, Elahi and Ara (2008) criticized the existing anti-Monga programs, stating that most of them lack a grounded understanding of the problem and fail to address local needs. They overlook local wisdom, which can be considered the "missing area of intervention." However, the following section discusses the major Monga eradication programs implemented in the study area.

Table 5: Actors' perceptions about the Monga in the study village

Respondent	Status of Monga			Remarks
	Remain same	Exist in a lesser form	No Monga	
UP Chairman			√	"No, Monga. Monga has changed now for various effective steps taken by the present government led by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina."
Agriculture Extension Officer			√	"After harvesting the new variety, farmers can go for early cultivation of Rabi crops like potato, with higher yields output. We are observing that farmworkers now get jobs due to early harvest of BRRI Dhan-33, and the curse of Monga has finished now."

Local NGO Officials		√		<p>"Massive social safety works like employment generation, VGF, VGD, TR, FFW and allowances for widows, aged people, divorcees, handicapped; sub stipends etc. have been playing vital roles towards the directions."</p> <p>"Easy-term and interest-free loans, allowances, training for unemployed male and female youths for income generations, the assistance of government, NGOs, donor agencies and development partners are playing important roles in eradicating Monga."</p>
<i>Dhan</i> Bank representative		√		" <i>Dhan</i> Banks now operating to deal with food security issues during the lean season and the Monga as well."
The Relief and Rehabilitation officer, Nilphamari			√	"Century-old seasonal 'curse' of Monga factually disappeared permanently following huge positive changes in the people's economic condition."

Source: Adopted from field survey, 2015

The food security concept adopted from FAO (1996) and Zug (2006) reveals that food availability is not a problem in the northwest region. However, the region faces challenges due to unstable accessibility and utilization patterns, leading to the annual occurrence of Monga in varying degrees of intensity (RDRS, 2011). Monga forces people to reduce the quantity and diversity of their nutritional intake, often resorting to the consumption of cheap and unclean food (RDRS, 2011). In some prolonged periods of Monga, the rural poor may have to survive without proper meals or even go without food altogether (RDRS, 2011). A survey conducted in Rangpur in 2007 indicated that the number of severely affected individuals by Monga increased by less than 10% during the non-Monga season but exceeded 50% during the Monga period (IMF, 2008). The already chronically undernourished individuals become weaker during Monga, leading to increased morbidity and further exacerbating their challenges during this period (Elahi and Ara, 2008). Talukdar (2000) emphasizes that instability is another significant aspect of the food security situation in the Monga region of Bangladesh, as food prices reach their peak while agriculture wages hit their lowest point during Monga.

Additionally, the depletion of grain stocks for subsistence and deficit purposes leaves farmers exhausted, further contributing to the reduction in food security during Monga (CEGIS, 2005). The combination of these factors and the impact of natural disasters as triggering agents has led researchers to stress the role of seasonal food price inflation in intensifying the severity of Monga (Khandker and Mahmud, 2011). Khandker and Mahmud (2011) argue that Monga often remains unnoticed as a form of silent hunger

because the abnormal food price hike usually triggers public outcry, explaining why government interventions aimed at food price stabilization have not effectively mitigated Monga.

Despite national-level food security efforts, the persistence of Monga suggests that it does not reflect the food security situation in the Rangpur region. Researchers have argued that the vulnerability associated with Monga is more severe than the problem of seasonal food insecurity (Rahman, 2007). CEGIS (2005) emphasizes that the effects of Monga surpass the overall conditions of people's activities, capabilities, and assets required for sustaining their livelihoods. National newspapers have provided valuable insights into the Monga problem through their coverage, as local journalists report at the Upazila and union levels (Ali, 2006).

Existing literature extensively explores various critical aspects of vulnerability associated with Monga, encompassing historical perspectives of famine or famine-like situations, food security and related concerns, ecological vulnerability, overall underdevelopment, poverty, inequality, seasonal employment, non-diversified agriculture development, low wages, price hikes, weak policies and programs, intensive erosive coping strategies, migration, and population displacement (CEGIS, 2005; Khandker and Mahmud, 2011; Rahman, 2007). These studies shed light on the multifaceted nature of vulnerability and its close relationship with the Monga situation.

Specifically, the literature identifies the following aspects as closely linked to Monga:

- i. Inconsistent accessibility and utilization patterns of food.
- ii. Reduction in the quantity and diversity of nutritional intake.
- iii. Dependence on cheap and unclean food.
- iv. Periods of inadequate or no food availability.
- v. Weakening of individuals already facing undernourishment.
- vi. Increased morbidity during Monga.
- vii. Fluctuating food prices and reduced agricultural wages.
- viii. Depletion of grain stocks.
- ix. Impacts of natural disasters.
- x. Seasonal food price inflation.
- xi. Ineffectiveness of government interventions for food price stabilization.
- xii. Regional disparities in food security.
- xiii. The severity of vulnerability during Monga.
- xiv. Effects of Monga on people's activities, capabilities, and assets.
- xv. Coverage and insights into Monga incidents provided by local journalism.

These aspects collectively contribute to the complex and challenging nature of the Monga situation, highlighting the need for comprehensive strategies and interventions to address the vulnerabilities and improve food security in the affected regions.

However, it is essential to note that there is a lack of systematically and sequentially available data and literature concerning the Monga syndrome. Furthermore, Monga can be considered a seasonal famine-like condition or food insecurity and hunger. The examination of food vulnerability among the affected households from their perspective has not been adequately explored. As a result, despite its significance in localized crises and socioeconomic consequences, the understanding of Monga remains limited among many people.

5. Conclusion

While the Monga phenomenon is unique to its specific context regarding causes, timing, and potential consequences, complete eradication is not feasible due to the diverse livelihood mechanisms and social indicators of poor households, many of which are dysfunctional. The Monga-affected individuals are vulnerable in various aspects, such as their reliance on nature, exposure to natural hazards, limited access to quality agricultural inputs, intense labor requirements and fluctuations in crop prices during harvesting, and lack of employment opportunities in the pre-harvesting period. These vulnerabilities, combined with severe poverty encompassing income poverty, human development poverty, and social exclusion, can perpetuate extreme food insecurity. The neoliberal trajectory of our state and society has influenced macroeconomic policies, shaping the political economy choices at the micro level, and altering how the Monga affects the poor's living conditions and coping strategies. Moreover, navigating the complex network of institutions involved in Monga policy negotiations could help alleviate food insecurity in the Rangpur region, serving as a test case for Bangladesh. However, addressing Monga requires depoliticisation efforts that establish food rights and ensure supportive facilities for sustainable livelihood patterns of poor households in Monga-affected regions.

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