

A Correspondent

Bagerhat: People in Amphan-hit Sharankhola upazila have been facing acute drinking water crisis as saline water gushed into the villages during the cyclone destroying their sources of safe water including ponds and tube-wells.

Local people said rainwater is the main source of drinking water for the people of the area. But the people living on the banks of Baleshwar river have lost their source of fresh water due to the tidal surge caused by Amphan, they said.

During a recent visit to the upazila, the correspondent found that during the devastating cyclone saline water flooded ponds and water bodies, making their water undrinkable .

Many people have to walk about one kilometer path to collect drinking water.

Locals said drinking water crisis is a long standing problem of the people of Sharankhola.

People are forced to use saline water for various purposes for lack of pure drinking water.

Zakaria Sardar of Bagi village said, " We had stored rainwater in the pond for drinking. But the saline water entered their ponds during Amphan, making the pond water undrinkable," .

Harun Hawlader, resident of the same area, said that they have suffering from the crisis for years. "Although there is water in the rivers and canals next to our house, but we can neither drink it nor use for other purposes due to excess salinity."

Many other residents of the area said that they are being forced to use saline water due to lack of safe water and suffering from various diseases for this reason.

Sadar Upazila health and family planning officer Pradeep Kumar Bakshi said if people drink saline water for a long time they will suffer from high blood pressure, skin diseases and other health complications.

According to the World Health Organization, one person needs less than one teaspoon of salt per day on an average, he said adding that drinking saline water for a long time could be life-threatening.

According to the Bagerhat Public Health Engineering Department, the total population of Sharankhola Upazila is 1.24lakh. On an average, a person needs 80 liters of water per day.

Only 40 to 45 percent of the people of the upazila get safe water due to various public and private initiatives. The rest of the people depend on water from various sources, he said.

Sharankhola Upazila has a total of 1,012 Pond Sand Fillers (PSFs) provided by government, private and donor agencies. Of those, 547 are government. Government's 332 PSFs went out of order long ago due to lack of maintenance.

FM Ismail Hossain, executive engineer of the Bagerhat Public Health Engineering Department said groundwater and surface water in Sharankhola contains excess salt.

People of those areas have to depend on rainwater but rainwater reservoirs have been destroyed by Amphan.

He said work is underway to install 18 nano filters to supply safe water to people. Each nano can supply one thousand liters of safe water per hour and 18 ponds are being re-excavated to store rainwater, he added.

He said there was no other way to overcome the water crisis except to build a large rainwater reservoir

Bagerhat Deputy Commissioner Mamunur Rashid said after Amphan hit the coastal district water purification tablets were given to the people of the cyclone-hit areas.

Measures have been taken to supply drinking water to the areas using trucks, he said.

