

# When the mighty river rises

**At 1,800 miles long, the Brahmaputra River flows through Tibet, India and Bangladesh. Every year, when the snow at its source melts, it can cause catastrophic flooding.**

For people living in the Char islands in northern Bangladesh, their lives and livelihoods can be precarious. Isolated from the mainland, these poor communities are at the whim of the river and an ever-changing climate.

Our partner GUK's staff make a daily four-hour round trip to the Chars six days a week to deliver a project that is transforming the lives of people there. This work has made locals more resilient, self-sufficient and knowledgeable about how to live in this tough environment.

Feroza Begum and her family, who you may have heard about during Christian Aid Week, arrived in Bazetilcupi Char with next to nothing four years ago after being flooded from their home. GUK identified Feroza and her family as 'ultra-poor'.

At that time, Feroza's husband Joynal (from our March Update) was having to work far away in Dhaka as a day labourer. Their income was on average 66p per day. 'I feel like crying when I think of those times,' Feroza told us.

Feroza was supported with cattle, poultry, the raising of her homestead (to protect it from flooding), training in agricultural techniques, and workshops in rights awareness. Now her assets are worth more than £3,500. Feroza has status in her community, owns land and is ambitious in her hopes for the future

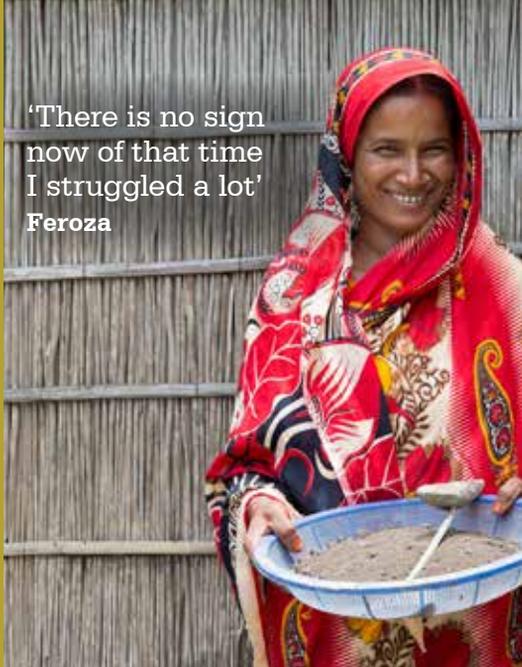
### **Free to choose**

Four years ago, Feroza and her family's life looked very different. Such was their poverty that she described wanting to 'break off her hands and legs' because she felt so useless. But with the support of GUK, she turned things around and is now able to make choices to improve her family's lives.



A little girl uses a banana-tree raft to travel through the flooded Bazetilcupi Char.

'There is no sign now of that time I struggled a lot'  
**Feroza**



In the last four years Feroza's life has been completely transformed. Once 'ultra-poor', she is now thriving.

### **Communities under pressure**

Each year, with increasing unpredictability, flooding and river erosion affect the lives, livelihoods and homes of Char dwellers like Feroza.

In the Chars, there are few opportunities for economic development beyond agriculture. A widespread lack of employment means male family members are often forced to migrate seasonally for work.

These factors are contributing to a worsening social and economic situation for communities already on the margins of society.

### **Resilience for the future**

As well as helping people earn a secure living, GUK is supporting them to improve their disaster preparedness, through early warning systems, emergency contingency planning and the provision of emergency shelters. A crucial aspect of the project has been the raising of people's homesteads, to protect their homes, animals and crops from flood waters.

While Chars communities will always be vulnerable to disasters such as flooding, this project enables people to build their assets and financial security, so they can make choices and think to the future.

As Feroza told us: 'Now I have more confidence. I enjoy more freedom and I have decision-making power. Even my value in my community has increased. What I have received from GUK has changed my life.'

On our visit to the Chars last year, we met more families like Feroza's in need of support. Whether giving as an individual or with your church congregation, every penny will make a difference.

**£25 could buy a goat for a family like Feroza's, providing important nutrition and milk to sell.**

**£75 could set an individual up with everything they need to rear chickens, giving them an important food supply and source of income.**

**£200 could pay to raise a family's homestead to protect it and everything they own from the floods.**

### **Climate change in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is particularly affected by the changing climate. Recent extreme temperatures before the 2015 monsoon demonstrated how average temperature rise can also increase the likelihood of dangerous heatwaves.

As well as rising temperatures, both average and extreme rainfall is projected to increase further, raising flood risks. Increased outbreaks of rain extend the length of the dry spells in between, contributing

to a decrease in crop harvests. This combination of factors means that the 80 per cent of Bangladeshis whose lives depend on agriculture will have to increase their resilience substantially to cope.