



# The Wretched of the Earth: Dimensions of Poverty in Island Chars

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# Life in *Char*



- ◆ *Chars* are home to 5-6 million people in Bangladesh.
- ◆ Life in *char* is highly vulnerable.
- ◆ Both employment and self-employment very low.
- ◆ Migration major option.
- ◆ Livelihood shocks and stresses are maximum in *char*.

# Island *Chars*

The most isolated are the island *chars* surrounded by water whole year or most part of it.



- ◆ Virtually non-existent infrastructural facilities.
- ◆ Poor sanitation.
- ◆ Lack of primary health care and educational facilities.
- ◆ Severe indebtedness
- ◆ Virtually no micro-finance.

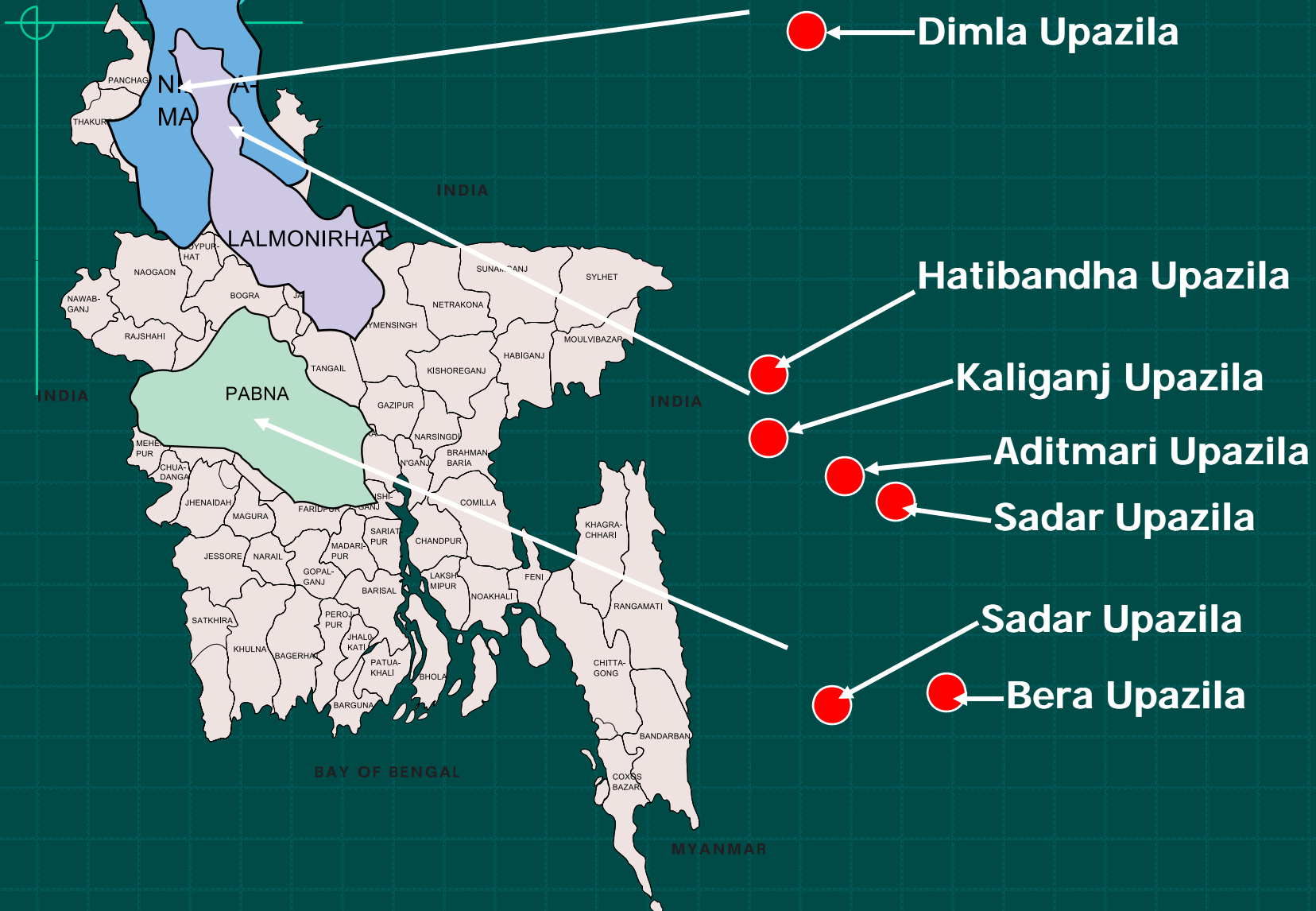
# The *Char* Poor

The most affected and the most vulnerable are the extreme poor people living in the *chars*.

Women are most deprived.



# Study Locations

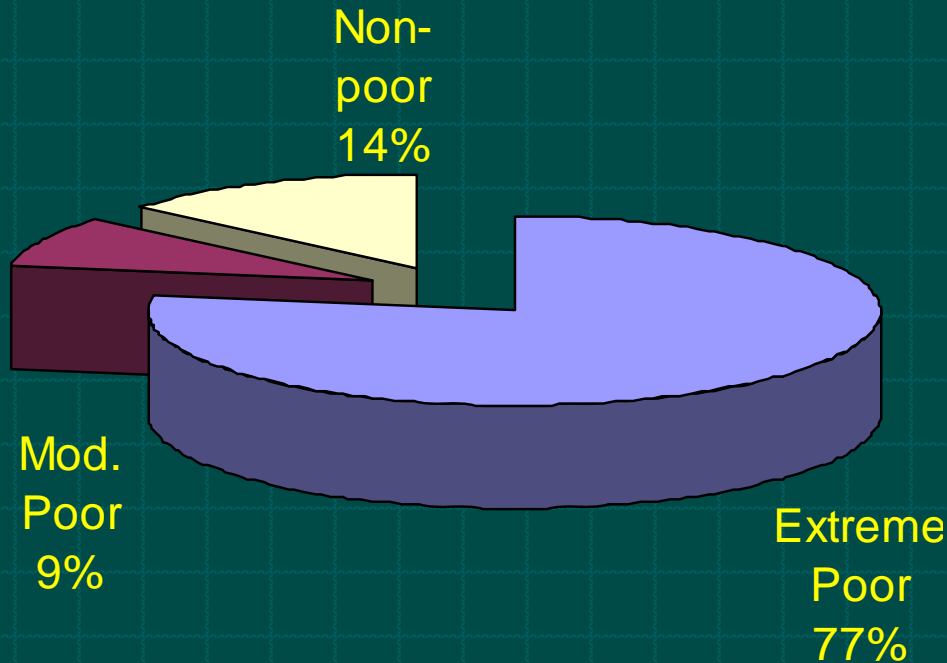


# Methods

- ◆ Questionnaire surveys
  - One on 1489 households
  - One of 1122 households
- ◆ Qualitative investigation
  - FGDs
  - Case studies
  - Mapping exercises
  - Observation
  - Interviews.

# Poverty in Island *Chars*

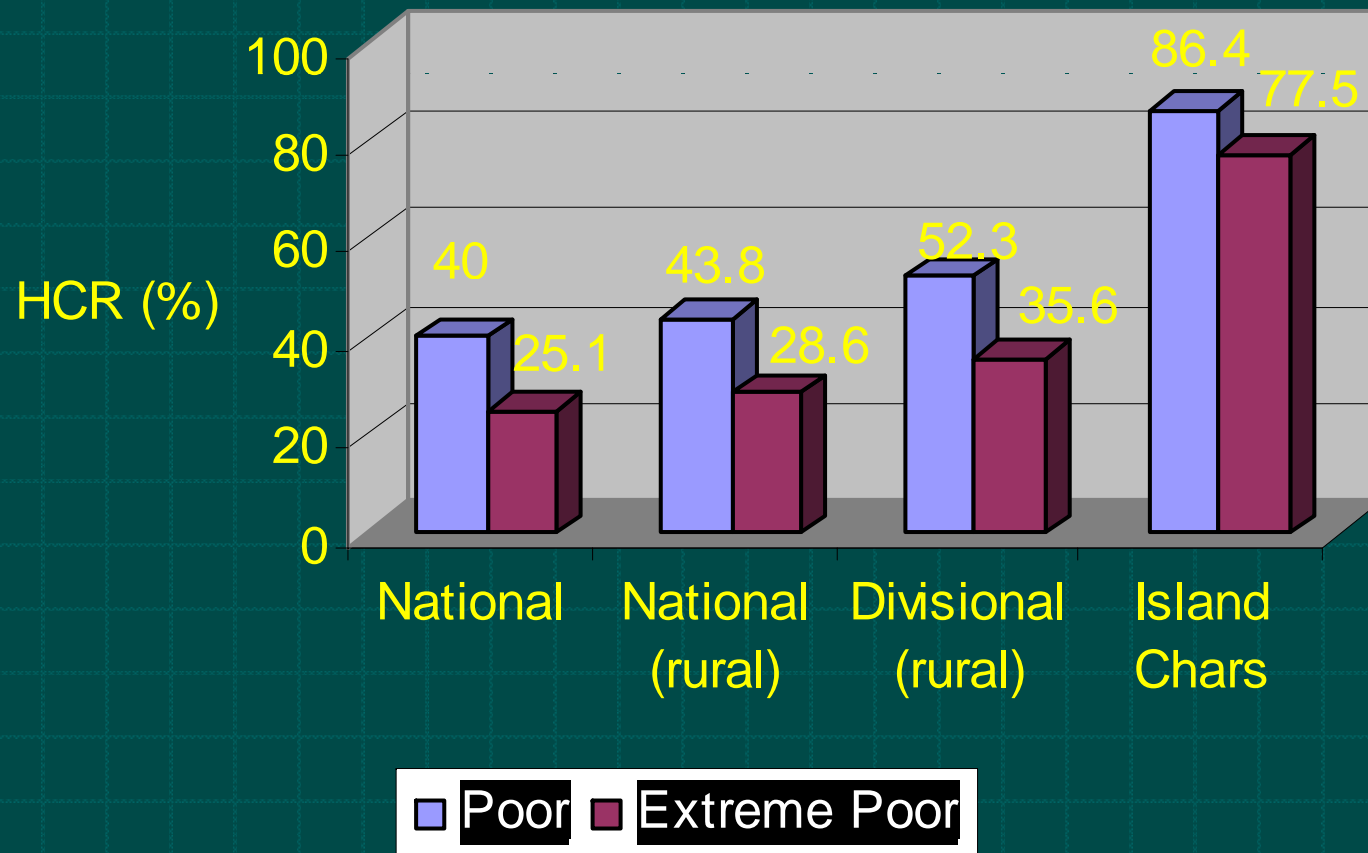
## Poverty Categories



- ◆ Estimated with Per Capita Expenditure
  - Using HIES 2005 defined poverty lines for rural areas in Rajshahi Division
  - Adjusted with inflation to compare with 2007 situation

# Poverty in Island *Chars*

## Head Count Ratio of Poverty



# Food Insecurity

- ◆ Seasonal poverty or *Monga* during September–November each year
  - Two-three months prior to the *aman* crop
- ◆ Main feature: severe scarcity of food.



# Food Insecurity

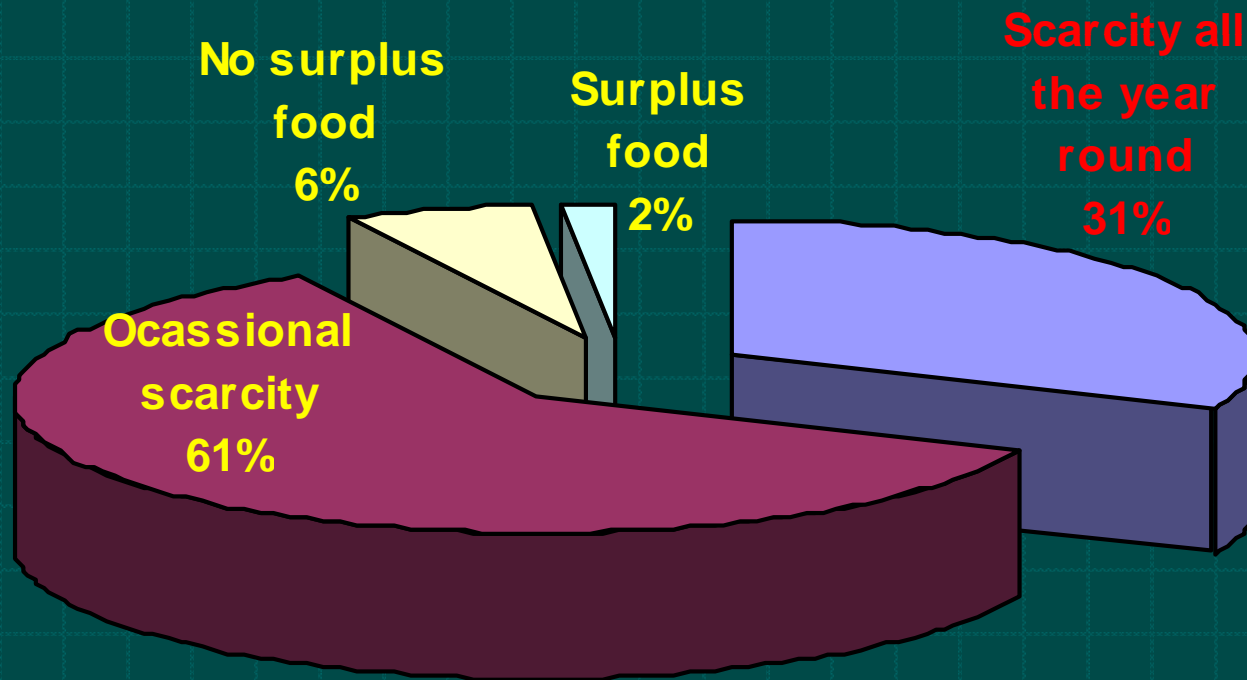
## ◆ Main features of *monga* (as perceived by island *char* dwellers)

- Most people are functionally landless
- Having no food
- Sandy soil not suitable for cultivation
- Not being able to buy food
- Only one meal a day
- Shift to low quality food
  - ◆ *Sattu* or ground barley/maize
- No work



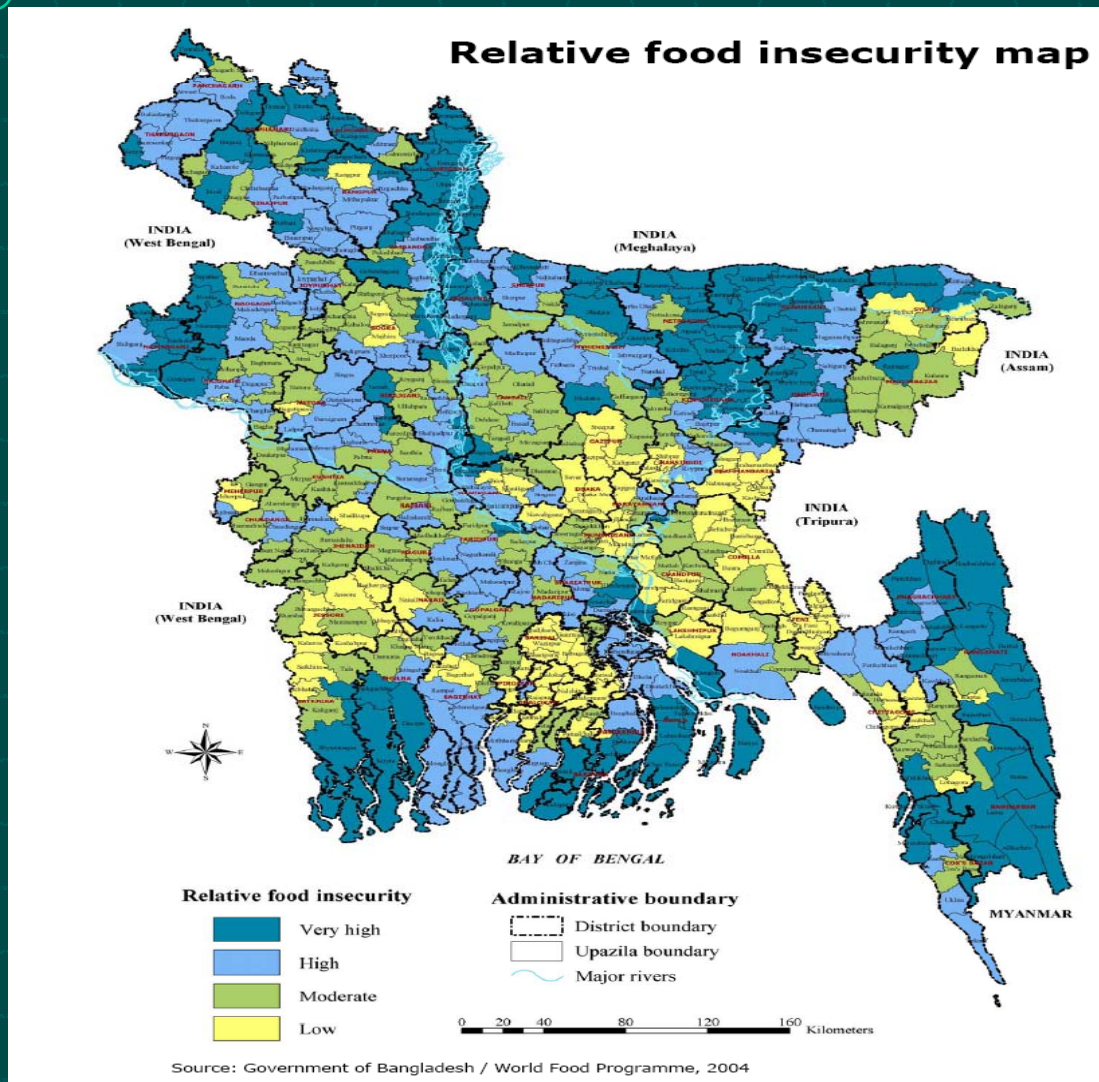
# Food Insecurity

## Food Sarcity in Island Chars (% of HHs)

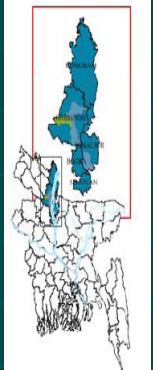


N = 1122

# Food Insecurity



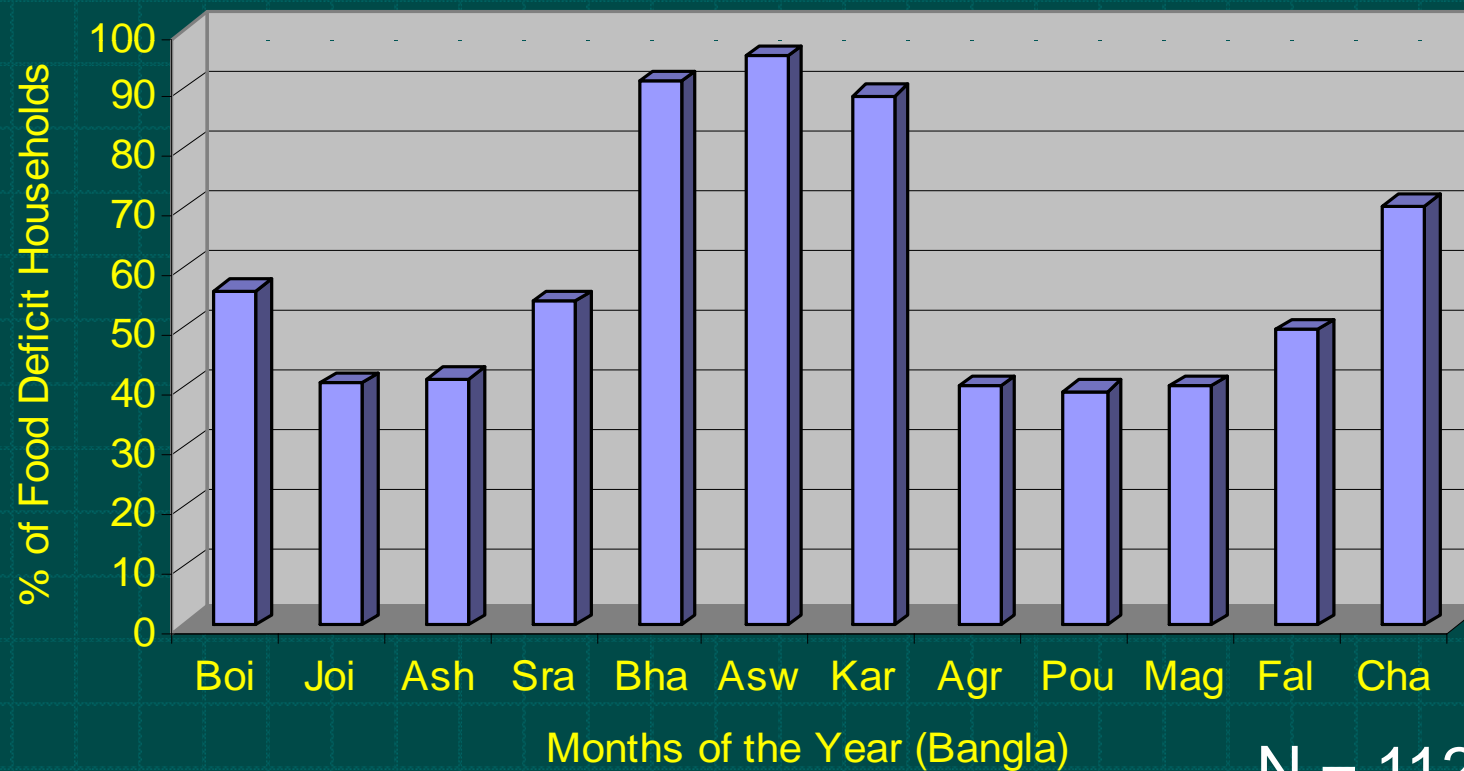
# Food Insecurity



*The  
Northern  
Chars*

# Food Insecurity

## Monthwise Proportion of Food Deficit Households



N = 1122

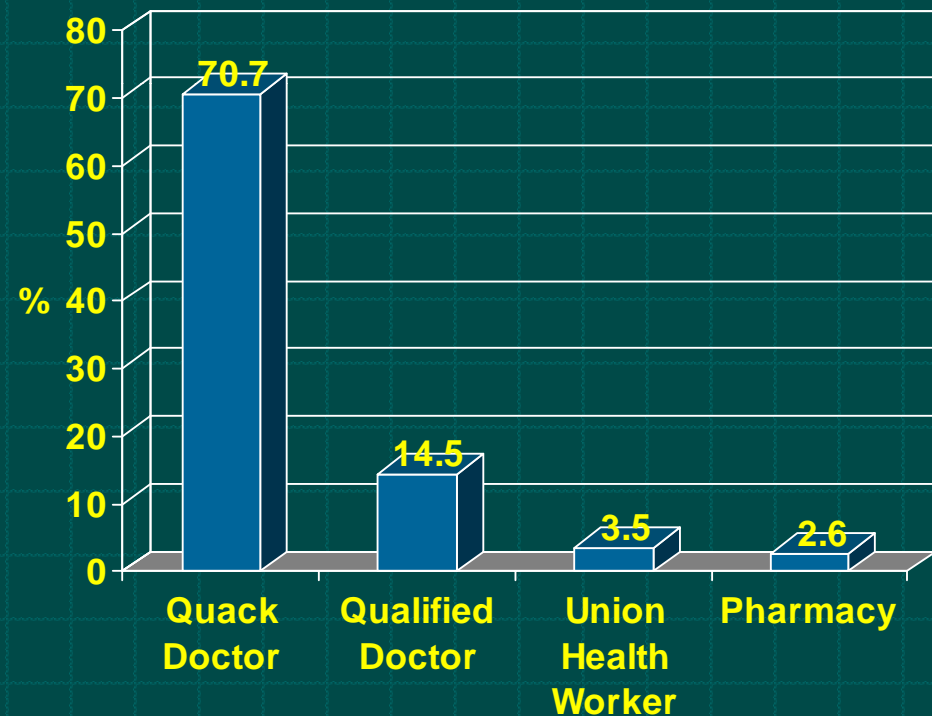
# Health Poverty

◆ 62% of the surveyed population suffered from diseases in last one year

- 11.1% people suffering from diarrhea and dysentery
- 87% got some treatment

◆ 77% of under-5 children suffered

Mode of Treatment in Island Chars



N = 1489

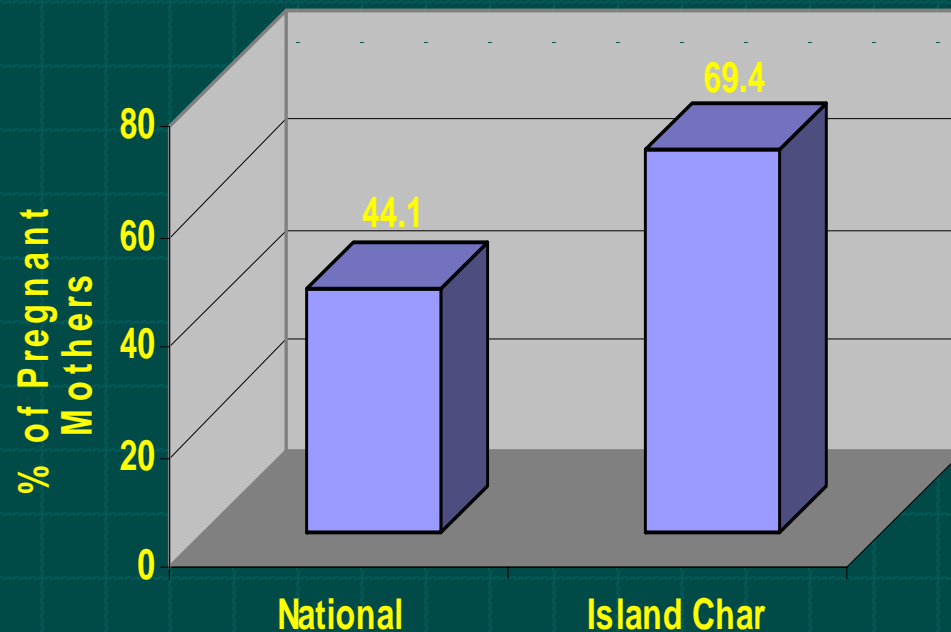
# Health Poverty

*"I occasionally come to this hospital and I observe that whatever the disease the visitors have, the doctor gives the same medicine from a box to everyone."*

A patient commenting on the service provided at a UHFWC.

# Health Poverty

## No Antenatal Care Received



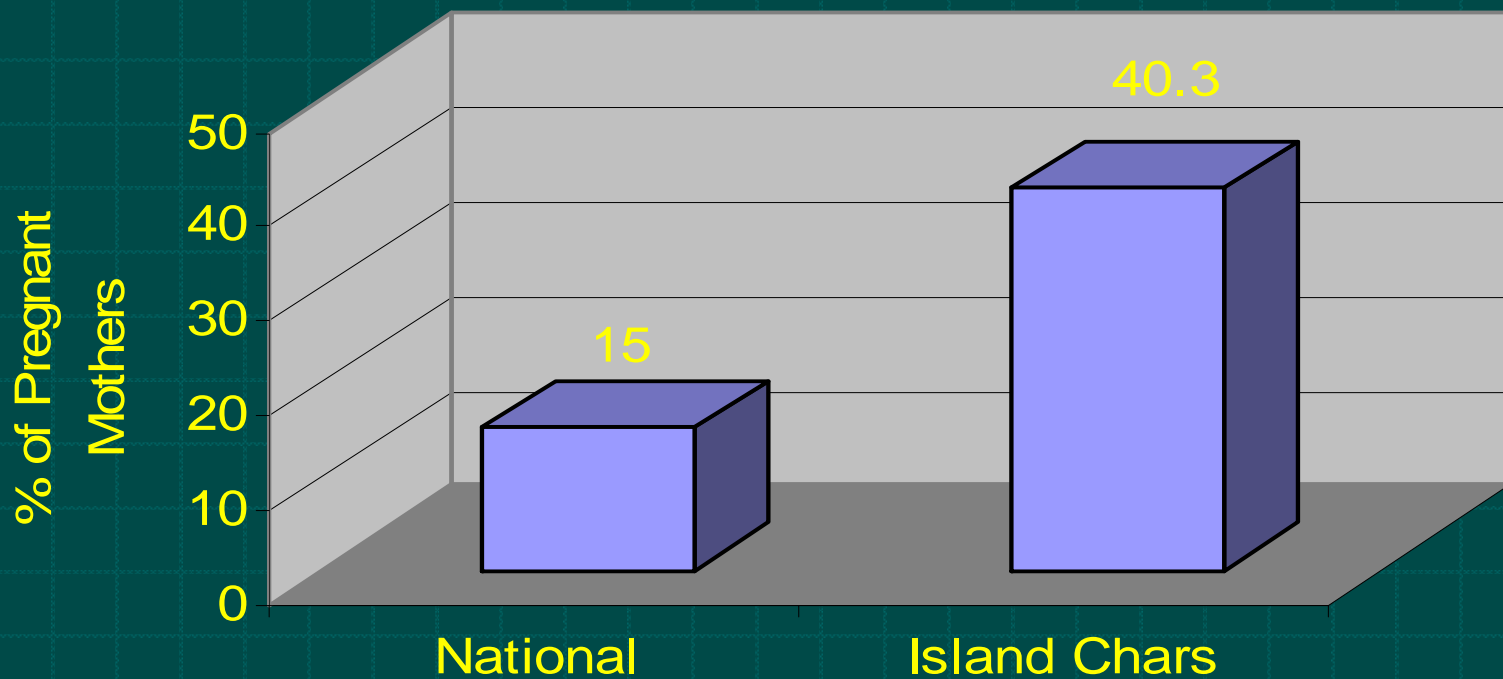
◆ Causes of low prevalence of ANC

- Lack of availability of services
- Ignorance
- Affordability.

N = 1489

# Health Poverty

## No TT Vaccine Received by Pregnant Mothers



N = 1489

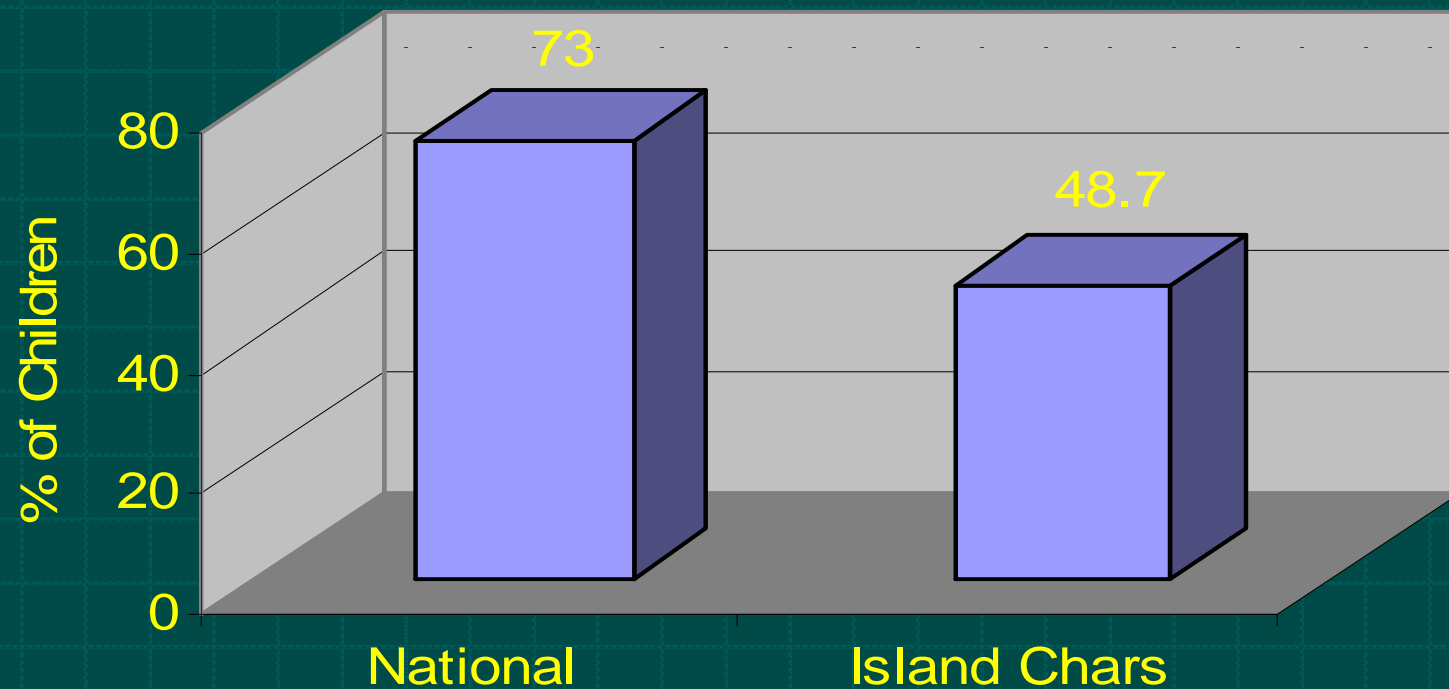
# Health Poverty

- ◆ 69% of the pregnant mothers received ANC services
  - Lack of treatment facilities (35%)
- ◆ 97% deliveries take place at the residence.
  - Only 1% at the govt. hospitals.
- ◆ 92% deliveries are assisted by untrained TBA
  - Only 2% attended by qualified doctor or health worker.
- ◆ No PNC for 85% mothers and no services for 87% children after birth.

N = 1489

# Health Poverty

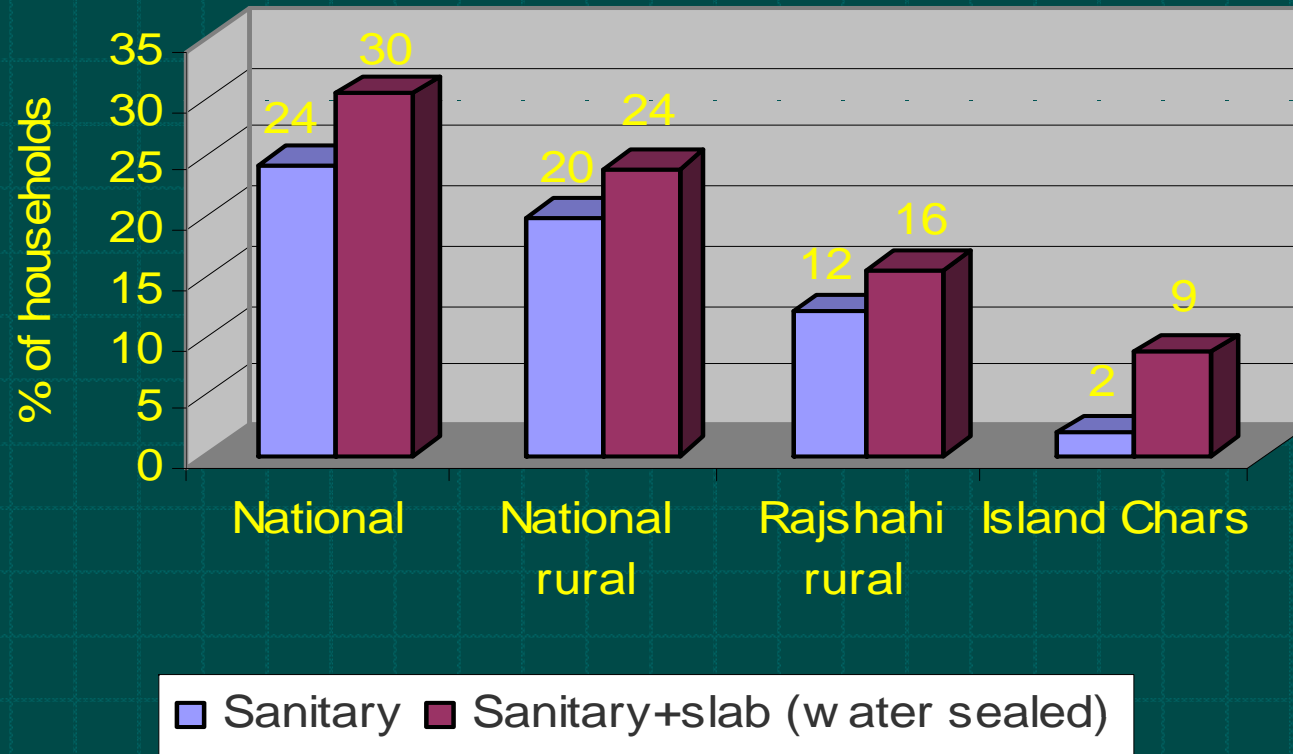
## Complete Immunization of Children Aged 12-23 Months



N = 1489

# Health Poverty

## Sanitation Coverage



N = 1489

# Lack of Social Protection

- ◆ Only 40 VGDs for the 1489 households, 1286 of which are poor and 1154 extreme poor.
  - Old Age Allowance 48
  - Widow Allowance 24.
- ◆ Overall coverage of VGDs over 5% in the 7 unions
  - Only about 2.7% covered in the island *chars*.

# Lack of Social Protection

- ◆ Leakage seems to be quite high
  - For example, 14% of the VGD recipients and 21% of the old-age allowance recipients have more than 50 decimals of cultivable land.
- ◆ Receipts of services often involves bribes
  - For example, 32% of the stipend recipients, 21% of the widow allowance recipients and 19% of the old-age allowance recipients had to pay bribe
  - Unfortunately, more than 57% of the bribe recipients are school teachers or officials.

# In the Policy

- ◆ PRSP acknowledges problems in *chars*
  - Extremely limited resource base
  - Problems in access to resources
  - Vulnerability to natural disasters
- ◆ PRSP addresses *chars* under several issues
  - Health
  - Safety nets
  - Education
  - Agricultural productivity
  - Flood
  - Land use policy and land administration reform
  - National water policy and water management

# Out of Policy Lens!

- ◆ In most cases, *Char* issues addressed in PRSP are
  - **Not sufficient**
  - **Not sufficiently focused**
- ◆ Need for special strategies
  - ***Char* PRSP?**
  - **Increase the coverage of social safety net in proportion to incidence of poverty**
  - **Introduce OMS in Chars**
- ◆ Encourage PKSF to
  - **Develop partnership with NGO working in the chars under special programs**
  - **Include char youths to get manpower training to finally earn remittances from cities and abroad**

# Out of Policy Lens!

- ◆ Develop Char development fund as a challenge fund
- ◆ Encourage NGO Foundation to increase its coverage in chars
- ◆ Enhance LGSP block allocations in Unions with chars
- ◆ Budget to focus on chars especially
  - **Flexible education infrastructure, Public-Private partnership.**

## Conclusion

*“Those whom you push down will chain you down  
Those whom you leave behind will pull you behind  
The more you envelope them under darkness of ignorance  
The more distant will your own welfare be !”*

Literal translation from a poem of Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) “Disgraced” in Gitanjali

যারে তুমি নীচে ফেল সে তোমারে বাঁধিবে যে নীচে  
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পশ্চাতে রেখেছ যারে সে তোমারে পশ্চাতে টানিছে।

অজ্ঞানের অন্ধকারে

আড়ালে ঢাকিছ যারে

তোমার মঙ্গল ঢাকি গড়িছে সে ঘোর ব্যবধান।

রবীন্দ্র-রচনাবলী, গীতাঞ্জলী, পৃ: ৭৩