

Living with floods

char islands

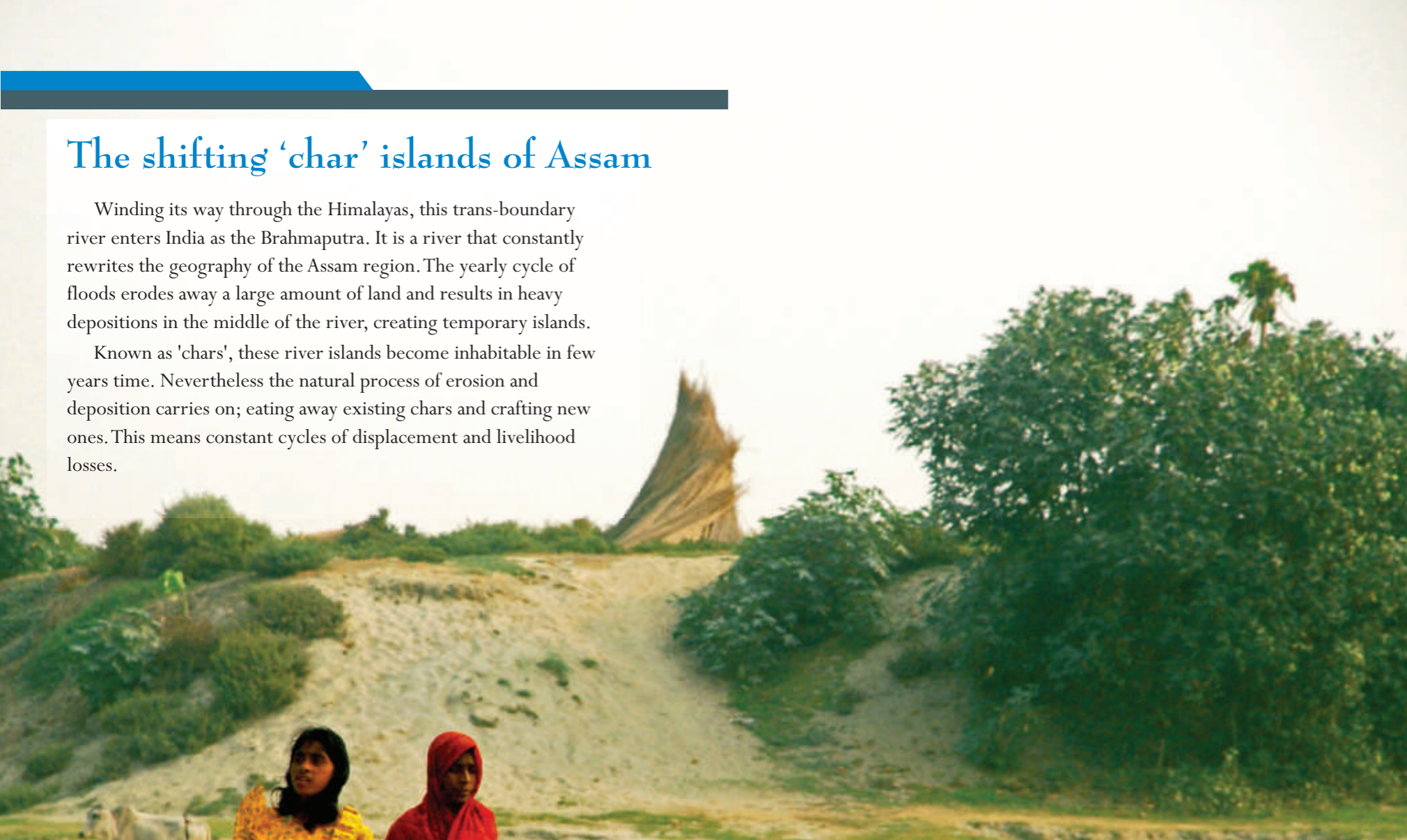


Safer World Communications/Kamal Chawla

The shifting 'char' islands of Assam

Winding its way through the Himalayas, this trans-boundary river enters India as the Brahmaputra. It is a river that constantly rewrites the geography of the Assam region. The yearly cycle of floods erodes away a large amount of land and results in heavy depositions in the middle of the river, creating temporary islands.

Known as 'chars', these river islands become inhabitable in few years time. Nevertheless the natural process of erosion and deposition carries on; eating away existing chars and crafting new ones. This means constant cycles of displacement and livelihood losses.



Life on the Bangi-Khwa Char

Such is the story of people presently dwelling on Bangi-Khwa char in Barpeta District of Assam. 7 years ago, they shifted here from a nearby mainland village. Now, they are once again in search of new lands. The char is eroding @ ½ km per year and has already reduced to 3 x 6 km from its original size of 7 x 6 km.

The Mobile House

This innovative concept uses high platforms (around 3 feet) with bamboo/RCC posts as a structural frame for durability and strength. Split bamboo (woven mats) panels are used for walling which are light and easily portable. Bamboo roof frames with CGI (corrugated galvanized iron) sheets ensure protection from the rain. In case of any emergency, the light weight construction can easily be dismantled in few hours time and shifted to a safer place. Another feature of the house is the bamboo false ceiling, which provides the required insulation and attic/storage space. It can also be brought



Moving inland with their house!

Jamal-ud-din (a daily wage labourer) had to shift further inland, as the water crept closer and closer to his house. Built in 2008 with the support of CASA, this house has a portable design. Jamal was able to dismantle and re-erect the entire structure as it was in his new inland location. "We never had a pukka (permenant) house," he comments. "But with CASA's support, we now have one with a raised plinth and a dual-purpose false ceiling."



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The speed and direction of the water is unpredictable. Shifting from one place to other has become a habit! I want to live and cultivate on my land...but that's under water now. I believe that one day my land will re-emerge.

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