

A group of women and children are sitting on a blue tarp outdoors, engaged in a community meeting. The women are wearing colorful saris and headscarves. One woman in the foreground is wearing a sari with a red and white polka dot pattern. Another woman is wearing a green sari with a red border. A child is sitting in the middle of the group. The background shows a dirt ground and some vegetation.

# **Community-based adaptation in practice: insights from coastal communities in Bangladesh**

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# Climate change vulnerability and adaptation in Bangladesh

## WHO SUFFERS MOST FROM **EXTREME WEATHER EVENTS**?

Six of Asia's countries are ranked among the world's top 10 countries most affected by climate risk based on frequency, death tolls and economic losses, according to the Global Climate Risk Index by think-tank Germanwatch.

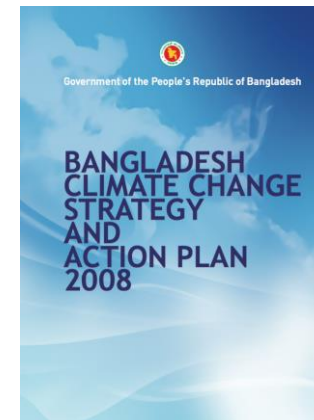


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Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change



GREEN  
CLIMATE  
FUND



The World Bank



# Climate change adaptation in Bangladesh

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- Top-down and bottom-up interventions
- Community-based adaptation (CBA) approaches
- Climate change has created an opportunity to transform the existing social and political system that shape adaptive capacity (Adger 2003, Pelling 2012).





# What is community-based adaptation (CBA)?

“Community-based adaptation is a *community-led process*, based on communities’ priorities, needs, knowledge, and capacities, which should *empower people* to plan for and cope with the impacts of climate change” (Reid et al. 2009, p.13).

- CBA interventions are commonly channelled through community-based organisations (CBOs) in Bangladesh and elsewhere.
- CBO members are capable to plan and implement adaptation initiatives independently.
- CBOs facilitate collective action.



# The objective

This paper explores why and how individuals and communities perceive and respond to community-based adaptation projects in rural coastal areas of Bangladesh that intend to build adaptive capacity.



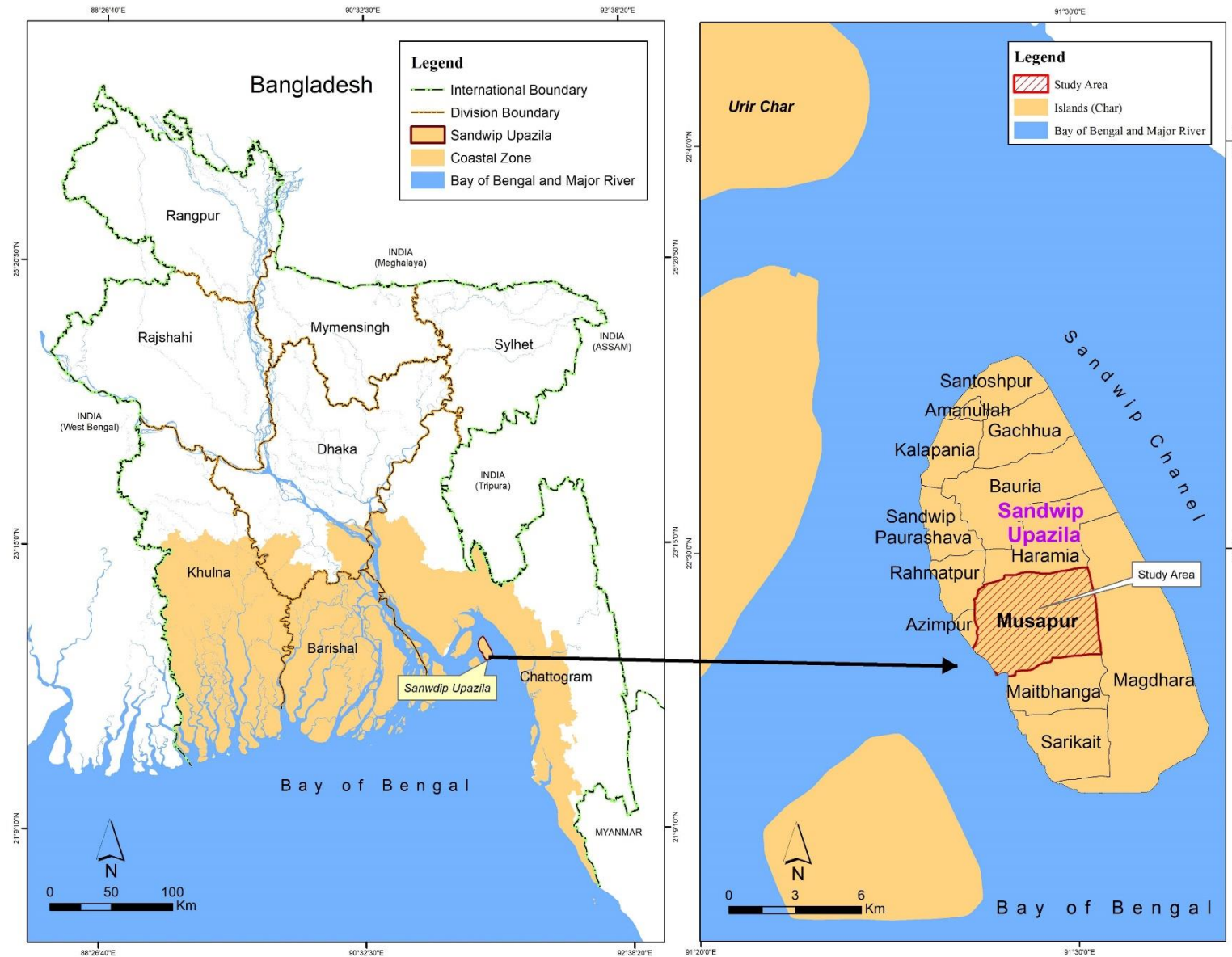


# Research approach and methods

- **Case study**
- **Semi-structured interviews** (NGO staff, local government representatives & officials, CBO & community leaders)
- **Focus group discussion** with CBO leaders and community members
- **Observations** (project implementation process & community responses)

# The case

- Resilience through Economic Empowerment, Climate Adaptation, Leadership and Learning (REE-CALL) project in Bangladesh
- A multi-donor donor funded project implemented by *Oxfam* with 12 Partner NGOs in three geographically different places from October 2010 to June 2017
- The southeast coastal areas: Sandwip
- Formed a seventeen-member executive committee for each CBO led by women
- CBO was the centre of all activities of the project









# The case..

## Objective of CBO

- Developing mutual relationships*** and sharing experiences among community members.
- Building functional linkages*** with different GO & NGO service providers
- Assisting to identify and analyse problems and to ***make plan and implement*** necessary steps to address those problems
- Establishing ***equal status of men and women***
- Building awareness*** to adapt to disaster and climate change risks
- Building capacity*** for leadership
- Changing attitude of community people ***from relief to self-reliance***

Source: Project documents & field data





# Findings

## 1. Poor women's perception about NGOs

- They value material resources than cognitive and relational ones.

*Why are you spending so much time, Sir? Why are you going through the hardship of coming here every day? Rather, give us whatever [supports] you will give us. Others [NGO staff] do not take such a long time. (Female CBO member)*



## 2. CBO leaders perceptions and their activities

- They perceived that CBOs were formed to manage the distribution of the project deliverables.

*They created different leadership positions and picked us for various posts. They selected president, secretary, etc., because they decided to give different support such as cow, goat and money for raising plinth of houses through them. (CBO leader)*



### 3. Change makers or project intermediaries

- The expectation and actions of CBO members were increasingly shaped by the planned activities of the project.
- The CBO leaders felt obligated to widen their project-related knowledge in order to keep the project.

*A CBO located at the other side of this canal had been cancelled as members could not answer the questions asked by top officers from Dhaka. We are unlike them. **We have memorised what they [project staff] thought us**; we can tell you the aim and purpose of our CBO. (CBO leader)*



## 4. Perception about sustainability measures of CBOs

- **Trainings**

*Women involved in our CBO are needy. A woman used to get Tk 600 for attending a two day-long training and with that money she can buy necessary food items for her family. Sometimes fruits were given as snack in trainings and some women brought those for their children. In trainings, they used to provide rich food which many of us do not afford to eat. That is why women were interested to go there. (CBO leader)*

-Led conflicts within the CBOs

- **Savings-led model**

*In REE-CALL, we created foodbank account. They told us if we face any problem such as natural disaster, we would not get aid from outside instantly. We can use our deposited money at that time. The people who do not understand it, they told that NGO would misappropriate the money... Many members do not believe me; they say I will embezzle this money. (CBO leader)*



## 5. Husbands' perception regarding women's participation in CBOs

- They hold the belief that women's activities should be confined to domestic or private spheres, but the possibility of attaining some project benefits led them to change their mind.

*In our religion [Islam], it is strictly forbidden for women to attend meetings. If they go they will burn in hell. My wife is supposed to maintain purdah, but she is not doing so. She is going many places for meetings and exposing herself to different men out of greed. NGOwalas [NGO staff] are inviting, they are going for money.*  
(CBO Leader)

## 6. Community perspective about CBOs and local legitimacy

- They primarily perceived the project as another rural development project that highlighted the improvement of community infrastructure and household livelihoods.
- According to rural elites *“it is group of women; I do not know about it.”*

*NGOs have been trying to bring women into the leadership; but they won't be successful. ...[because] They do not have any educational qualifications, so society will accept their opinion. They do not have their own identity; how would they speak in front of others. They are involved in bad work, and step in in others' personal matters. They fight over little things; **they do not have cooperative mentality, patience and honesty.** They do everything for acquiring their **personal benefits.** **They do not have a collective attitude.** So how they would lead? We cannot expect any good work from them. (Community Leader)*



# Conclusions

There is a mismatch between priorities of NGOs and those of the targeted local people and communities, which leads to a significant perception gap.

This disconnection negatively impacts on the external efforts of building adaptive capacity of the vulnerable communities.



Thank You