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The role of communities in resource allocation and monitoring: Bangladesh

Submitted by: Ground Truth Solutions, ICCCAD, IIED

A recent [report](#) from Ground Truth Solutions, ICCCAD and IIED shows that people on the front lines of the climate crisis in Bangladesh see the assistance they receive as not responding to their most pressing needs and failing to take their views into account. This case study will set out key findings from the report and make the case for greater community engagement in funding allocation decisions and the monitoring of loss and damage support.

In late 2022, we surveyed 2,367 people in two coastal sub-districts (Shyamnagar and Golachipa) and one inland sub-district in the northwest of Bangladesh (Sirajganj Sadar). The survey was complemented by 12 focus group discussions and 48 interviews in the three sub-districts. We asked climate-affected people how they perceive the quality and impact of climate adaptation and relief programmes in their communities, and the extent to which they feel their views, opinions and experiences are considered in decision-making.

We found that after years of adaptation work led by non-governmental and government bodies, the people targeted by these programmes feel better able to deal with the precarities caused by climate change. Many point to progress in areas like cyclone warnings and flood- protection infrastructure. Overall, though, they consider these interventions inadequate in the face of multiple and inter-related challenges, from flooding and extreme heat to the ability to make a living or relocate to safer ground. People express concern about who is covered by climate-linked assistance and who is not. They point to a lack of information on how resources are targeted and spent. Perhaps most important of all, many community members say that they don't feel their views count for much. Some say they are reluctant to voice them for fear of reprisal.

Respondents saw a significant mismatch between their top priority needs and the assistance they receive. 83% of respondents in Shyamnagar and Golachipa say that climate-resilient infrastructure was their top priority which was not currently being met, with widespread calls for investment in more resilient embankments and roads and for more and better disaster shelters which are adapted to the particular needs of, for example, persons with disabilities and pregnant women. In Sirajganj Sadar, programming has historically focused on floods, but people now feel that other, harder-to-address risks need attention. 79% of people selected heatwaves as the hazard of most concern to them.

Many respondents pointed to the inadequacy of short-term support when farmland is becoming less productive and land unliveable. Of those who have received support in Siraganj Sadar, only 13% say it has improved their ability to deal with the impacts of climate change. Disasters such as cyclones, riverbank erosion and saline intrusion are leading to food and water insecurity, unstable employment and severe economic losses. People try to recuperate their losses through relief items, cash-based assistance and loans, but say it won't be long before another disaster hits and they find themselves back in the same situation, or worse. Many respondents rely primarily on loans and expressed concern over becoming trapped in endless cycles of debt due to frequent disasters, high interest rates and the inability to meet payment deadlines. Respondents say they need more access to resilient crop varieties, water treatment systems and storage tanks, as well as training on sustainable agriculture and aquaculture. They also call for support to diversify their livelihoods and reduce their dependency on natural resources. They stress the importance of improving access to education for children, to prevent them from relying on vulnerable livelihoods in the future. One female community leader



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summed this up by saying *“The support they provide doesn’t help much at all. People don’t want any more rice and lentils. There is no more land to live on. We need better support.”*

Overall, people do not feel listened to by aid providers and are not meaningfully engaged in the support they receive. Although people told us they are highly motivated to advocate for their needs and provide feedback on interventions to ensure better outcomes for themselves and their communities, half of the people surveyed in Shyamnagar and Golachipa do not feel their thoughts and opinions are considered by decision-makers. On average, 50% of people feel like their community members can influence the support they receive, but respondents say their influence is often limited to targeting and rolling out predetermined activities for pre-designed projects. In Siraganj Sadar only 11% of respondents felt they have a real say in the support they receive. This is frustrating for the many who feel they are not getting sufficient support to enhance their well-being and long-term resilience. Many say that they are constantly voicing their needs to government agencies and NGOs but are largely ignored. People in Shyamnagar and Golachipa have mixed feelings about providing feedback. Despite 55% of people saying that they can provide some feedback on the support they receive, only 42% have done so. Many say there are limited benefits to doing so as they rarely see follow-up. In all focus groups people said that they are often scared to complain due to fears that organisations will stop supporting them or that they will be harmed. This reveals an urgent need for greater trust between communities and project implementers, and for feedback mechanisms that allow for safe and anonymous reporting.

This lack of engagement leads to significant concerns about the fairness of assistance provided, with 46% of respondents saying that aid is not provided fairly. 86% of people in Shyamnagar and Golachipa feel that there are people in their community who are left out. The lack of transparent information could be a reason why people feel this way. On average, in both sub-districts, 60% of people don’t know how organisations choose who receives support and who doesn’t, and 74% don’t know how funding to deal with the impacts of climate change is spent in their communities. As a result, people are coming to their own conclusions about how government agencies and NGOs are working. In Shyamnagar and Golachipa, many respondents feel that people are chosen for assistance based on their connections with implementers, rather than on their needs. Many also claim that organisations are taking a lot of the money that is supposed to be injected into their communities.

This evidence shows that communities must be engaged in how loss and damage support is prioritised and dispersed to ensure resources are spent where they are most needed, benefitting those who are least able to weather shocks. Without meaningful community engagement, loss and damage support will fail to have maximum impact and will not be fully supported and trusted by communities. The full report is available [here](#).