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# Climate Tribune

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## **Rethinking adaptation**

Why we needed to shift from community-based to locally-led adaptation

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Ishtiakh Ahmed

“I hear a lot of news about billions of dollars being funded to Bangladesh but I do not see any reflection here in my village. So where does that money go?” asked Abdur Rahman, a 65 years old tea seller from South-Southkhali, Sharonkhola, Bagerhat.

Such queries force us to rethink the entire process of development. Abdur Rahman’s village was hit by the cyclone Sidr in 2007, the aftermath of the disaster followed a wave of development projects in the community. Hundreds of development projects with huge funding surged in Southkhali village. However, even after 13 years of that event, this area is still struggling with poor

involved. In most cases of CBA initiatives, implementers have their own agendas, articulate that into community assessment, and keep the local involvement until identifying the issues.

Therefore, the potential solutions are still top-down, dependent only on expert knowledge and without any consideration of the local context. In many cases, it only benefits the same group, having the same individual in multiple NGO benefiting groups and many others out of any groups.

However, one of the main issues with the CBA is to perceive the community as a homogenous group and coming up with a single solution for all.

“While most of the people in this village will tell you to build an embankment and rest they can manage, I do not want an embankment since it will not benefit me at all. My house is on the bank of the river and the new embankment will be built further inside keeping me out to be eroded in the river. So tell me how would that save me?” said Amina Begum of Majher Char, Pirojpur.

Similarly, in Dalbanga South, Barguna, an embankment was built keeping more than hundred houses on the outer side and having no further planning for those households from the implementers. Most of those households do not have any more land inside and will end up living on the embankment making it weak to sustain.

CBA initiatives are receiving limited success because of its normative framing (Westoby et al 2019) as the geographical scale at which adaptation “takes place” has less focus on people, and it is problematic to be just “based” at the community because the community is not a homogenous group. They have argued that there is a need to shift the entry point for

support from community-based to locally-led adaptation because initiatives that are locally-led will have local context, local culture, local dynamics, local knowledge and aspiration. The major shift will be from “based” to “led”, where local people will have the driver’s seat and have the ownership of it.

An example of a locally-led initiative from the coastal belt of Bangladesh, a region that is increasingly facing salinity intrusion in both land and water, saw it helping local people to adapt to the salinity problem.

The Kultoli village in Munshiganj union, Shyamnagar would normally have rice harvest once a year due to high salinity in the dry season, suffering from a lack of work opportunities. Many development projects that have been implemented in this region to provide livelihood support including skills training, better seed supply, micro-credit loans, and alternative farming tools and techniques, only contributed to a few individual success stories and failed to change the broader scenario.

In several needs assessment sessions conducted by NGOs, local people strongly insisted upon the need to re-excavate the canals that once provided fresh water. Nevertheless, all the development processes followed their predefined agendas.

Two years ago, with support from a local organization, villagers started re-excavating the dead canals using their own resources. Subsequently, local NGOs facilitated the excavation process and helped protect the canal from land grabbers to ensure access to the whole community. This canal has brought about a substantial change in the area, providing support to almost everyone in one way or another. People are now able to harvest thrice a year, which has created work opportunities for all, both directly and indirectly.

What started with a locally-led initiative, now allows this sub-district to have two kilometers long freshwater canal, which also serves as a public resource that local people can avail for fisheries and agricultural purposes. A local solution that did not require a lot of funding and could have been done long ago has made several communities adaptive to the issue of salinity. Such locally-led initiatives need further funding support to be promoted.

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Historically, development activities in south Asia are always donor driven and it was assumed that the North knows the best and are happy to provide that knowledge to the South

housing, lack of safe drinking water. Lack of work means people have to depend on relief. So, what did those hundreds of projects produce?

Historically, development activities in south Asia are always donor driven and it was assumed that the North knows the best and are happy to provide that knowledge to the South, to the vulnerable. With the changing climate, this top-down process was transferred to the adaptation activities and implementing actions to make the South climate-resilient.

However, with heavy criticism for lack of local involvement in the planning process and zero sustainability at the project end, Community Based Adaptation (CBA) came to the debate and thought of to be a perfect solution for the local-level adaptation process.

This has indeed provided a few positive changes. Local people have started getting involved in the process. But it was again defined by the implementing agencies how local people will get in-





Bangladesh has been practicing local adaptation techniques for generations to adapt to climate change risks. This photo illustrates the long-practiced floating garden agriculture in Bangladesh.

THE NEW HUMANITARIAN

# **Call for a robust mechanism to ensure the effective implementation of Locally-led Action**



## How to frame and strengthen an effective MEL of LLA on the ground?

Farah Anzum and Saleemul Huq

Most of the dynamic and innovative adaptation solutions around the world are developed by people and communities living at the forefront of climate change. These solutions are generally locally-grounded and context-specific as local people remain in the main driving seat of action. Yet, those same people often lack access to resources and power to implement locally derived solutions. To equip and enable these local communities, Global Commission on Adaptation (GCA) has adopted the “Locally-led Action” (LLA) track among its total eight tracks in the flagship Report called “Adapt Now”, published in September, 2019. These action tracks have also launched a ‘Year of Action’ to scale up climate adaptation solutions.



This mechanism should be efficient enough in measuring the progress of actions in both quality and quantity as well as ensuring local actors at the core of interventions.

The concept of LLA refers to the set of actions planned to address the direct and indirect impacts of climate change. These actions have to be decided by local actors (community-based organizations, local government, local private sector) rather than being determined exclusively by higher level authorities, following a top-down mechanism. It goes beyond only “community participation” or “engagement”. Instead, it focuses on localizing initiatives by involving local actors to develop solutions that are context-specific, efficient, democratic, and accountable to and for the poorest and the most vulnerable people.

The recently published flagship report ‘Adapt Now’ of GCA also highlights the importance of LLA. It advocates for increasing the volume of devolved and decentralized funding available to local governments and institutions to identify, prioritize, design, implement, and monitor solutions. These institutions are believed to be better placed to give vulnerable and excluded communities greater agency over how they can develop and adapt to climate change, shifting

from being beneficiaries to leaders.

To strengthen locally-led action (LLA), the global adaptation community has also agreed to collaborate in stimulating “locally-led” initiatives. LLA goes beyond merely “community-based” practices as adaptation actions need to be “locally-led” and not limited to “communities.”

However, the question of assessing long-term sustainability and effectiveness of these initiatives are yet to be decided. These gaps pave the basis for developing robust monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) mechanisms to retain LLAs on the ground. This mechanism should be efficient enough in measuring the progress of actions in both quality and quantity as well as ensuring local actors at the core of interventions. It should also enable local people to equip themselves in such a way that they can sustain their initia-

tives over the long-term.

Analyzing the long-practised Community-based Adaptation (CBA), several gaps can be highlighted to strengthen the MEL of LLA. For instance, top-down adaptation planning and its associated M&E frameworks often fail to capture an accurate picture of what works on the ground. Studies have shown a lack of transparency around the knowledge and learning needs of different stakeholders, who engage themselves in investing CBA projects and fundamentally influence M&E outcomes. Hence, if MEL is to provide critical support to the process of identifying what works, the question of who MEL works for, demands more significant consideration. Also, donor-driven projects often only focus on representing value for money and results of interventions for upward accountability purposes. This viewpoint provides a useful lens to rethink perceptions of appropriate stakeholders and scales to be acknowledged in the MEL practice of LLA.

On August 25, 2020, LLA partners discussed several potential principles on the LLA track. These principles

mostly highlighted the potential of a devolution mechanism that can help the decision-making process of most affected by climate change; enabling simple, predictable and greater access to funding sources by local actors; strengthening local institutions to build long-term capacity to enhance resilience; provision to address structural inequalities that create vulnerability to locally-led adaptation; building a robust understanding of the potential climate risk and uncertainty; transparency and accountability of the interventions and finally a coordinated action and investment mechanism by various stakeholders, for instance: donors, governments or others to address all climate risks or vulnerabilities.

To measure the progress of various interventions under the LLA track, there is a higher need to develop robust indicators to assess the principles. Regarding this, LLA partners also discussed several potential indicators to monitor and evaluate them. The indicators could include projects or programs that articulate the rationale for the level of subsidiarity of decision making of local-level actors for adaptation design; quantity or percentage of different measures implemented that address structural inequalities.

Also, indicators are essential to understand whether the situation of a program supports institutional capacity development or the number of interventions that highlight the traditional and local knowledge in developing solutions. It is also necessary to articulate programs or project’s long-term vision to assess the sustainability of the interventions.

However, as financial support is an essential factor, robust indicators are necessary to understand the flexible funding application in different programs. Also, to ensure and enhance transparency and accountability mechanisms, indicators are needed to analyze programs that have established and used local accountability mechanisms.

At the same time, the local actor’s participation in the national or regional decision-making processes can help to evaluate their integration in policy-making processes. Strengthening the partnership across public, private, and civil society actors can also ensure the inclusivity of various actors. Hence, indicators can also be developed to assess these partnerships as well as analyzing the accountability of decentralized adaptation decision making at the local level. However, these indicators are not



Often, donor-driven MEL does little to integrate or incentivize learning for LLA

a means of an end in itself. Instead, a comprehensive and integrated discussion is required among the multiple LLA stakeholders to modify, add, or alter these sets of indicators in alignment with the future LLA principles.

Besides the monitoring and evaluation strategies, it is also essential to incorporate and highlight the learning from various programs and interventions to strengthen the future MEL of LLA. Often, donor-driven MEL does little to integrate or incentivize learning for LLA. As a result, they fail to capture lessons that could be cascaded upwards to steer funding flows towards better results on the ground.

Hence, to ensure an effective MEL framework, projects must engage local communities in participatory monitoring, evaluation, and learning activities from the start and integrate their learning and information needs throughout the project cycle. Donors and aid agencies must recognize the role of bottom-up learning and make space for learning at all levels. Lastly, higher emphasis should be given in building trust and ownership among national to local level partners to initiate a participatory MEL mechanism to assess the progress of LLA and ensure a robust as well as a sustainable model on the ground.

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# What locally-led adaptation looks like

LLA in Monpura

Md Nadiruzzaman

**M**onpura island became a widely known name across the country in 2009 after an eponymously titled Bangladeshi movie became a blockbuster hit in the cinemas. But Monpura was well known to people working in disaster management related fields. Situated on the southern coast at the Meghna estuary, the area is a known name to people involved in disaster risk reduction (DRR) because of its frequent exposures to extreme coastal events.

The island has experienced the wrath of major cyclones and tidal surges in 1970, 1991, 1997, 2007, 2009, 2013, and 2019. According to the oral history told by local people, no women and children on this island survived the 1970 Bhola

services like education, health, banking, finance, and livelihood information, which a standard Upazila has.

These development deficits constrain their advancement. On top of that, regular extreme events damage

tributes. Since life in Monpura runs on trial and error, there could be a debate whether their everyday adjustments could fit into the concept of 'scientific' adaptation. Instead of bringing that debate up, I would like to elaborate on the processes of those adjustments from designing to implementing their actions against adversities to propose an idea of how a locally-led adaptation could essentially look like.

#### By the locals, for the locals

Mukti was designed through a bottom-up approach to strengthening individual and household capacity to reduce their disaster risk through protecting and diversifying people's livelihoods. Project employees are from the locality who understand the local culture, norms, and practicalities.

They also live in the project sites which allow them to develop connectedness with the place and experience local events of all sorts. Project employees' consistent engagement with the people and place helps to understand local challenges and needs.

Senior management of the organization consults with the community and project staffs to identify a potential list of activities, evaluate them based on previous experiences, consult with external experts to further validate the list and synchronise the activities in different bundles, and discuss them with the higher management and donors to make them strategically aligned.

Finalized project activities were tried in real-life settings to obtain further feedback from the beneficiaries. Thus, they planned the project kick-off phase in a fashion to maximise the benefit of

the people. Flexibility was visible all through the project phases, spanning over 46 months, from June 1, 2016, and March 31, 2020.

For instance, a few activities were either cancelled or amended on recommendations from the beneficiaries at different stages of the project. Thus, adaptation measures were locally relevant and they were designed through emancipatory participation of beneficiaries. This approach empowered the participating beneficiaries and reciprocally assured their active engagement through designing activities around how people experience their needs amid environmental onsets.

#### Theory of change:

The earlier section of this article highlights some major elementary steps and philosophical foci to set the scene. The following step is to finalise activities and bundle them up with weaving logic to achieve a set of outcomes.

In this case, the article looks at the activities through the lens of sustainable livelihood framework, where - (i) a set of asset bundles are decayed by stresses and hazards from one side, and (ii) structures, legislations, and support services protect the asset bundles through injecting resources and reducing magnitudes of stresses from the other end. In case of an efficient support system, despite pressures from all sorts of calamities, protected asset bundles flourish in its course and contribute to human wellbeing, which eventually accelerates investments to enhance asset bundles. Thus, livelihoods are protected against the backlashes of adversities and spiral up as life goes on.



## Since life in Monpura runs on trial and error, there could be a debate whether their everyday adjustments could fit into the concept of 'scientific' adaptation

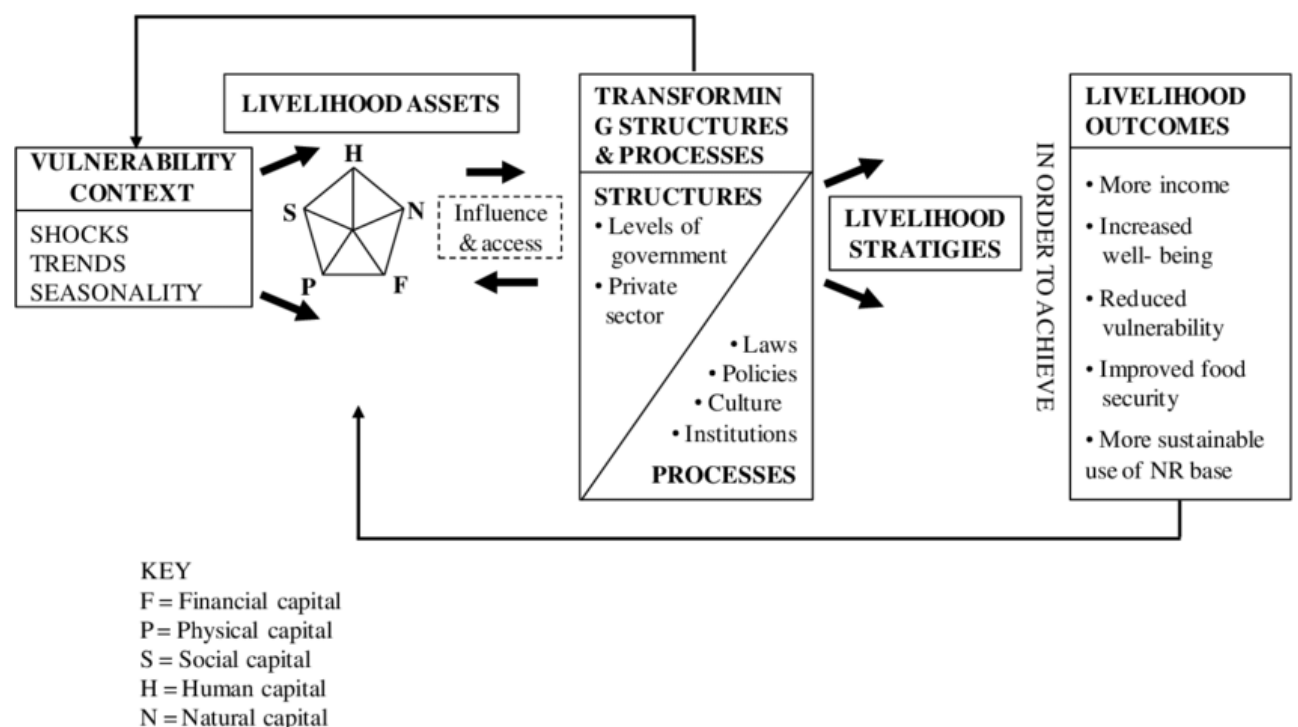
cyclone. CRS and Caritas Bangladesh are responding to some of their local issues as a coordinated effort known as Mukti. I supported designing and evaluating the second phase of this project when I had the opportunity to spend six weeks on that island with my research team. We tried to understand the meaning of environmental stress in their everyday life. I experienced three depressions while being in that place. I observed what they value as their strength and how they progressed to achieve them. I would like to tell this story here.

Monpura, like any inhabited island on the coast, has a larger group of fisher folks, who are heavily dependent on mohajons for boats, fishing-nets, family maintenance, and selling their catch. Mohajons, who are moneylenders, have existed as a historic informal financial institution and often operate as loan sharks. They exist in the fishing supply chain at different tiers and operate like one-stop financial service providers for fishermen. In return, they use fishermen as their bonded labour to accrue their profit.

Some fishermen have agricultural lands as a supporting livelihood. A small portion of them who are relatively well off own enough lands to avoid going off to fishing. They, being in a low lying island, are regularly inundated in king tides and water surges. Their remote location deprives them of institutional

their crops, kill their livestock, shrink their fish catch, and make them indebted. Against this backdrop, Mukti supported to empower them and to fight through the challenges. We capture their act as adaptation, action, or process of voluntarily adopting or being compelled to adapt.

In the context of hazard and risk, adapting means adjusting to a new or unfamiliar set of climatic attributes or changed parameters of existing at-



**Vulnerability context:** As mentioned already, Monpura is one of the most vulnerable islands in Bangladesh where people are living under the frequent threats of cyclones, floods, and river erosion due to its underlying geographic, cultural, economic, and political conditions. Recurrent environment onsets make families and communities more vulnerable and constrain growth. Against this backdrop of disaster-prone households and communities with a fragile asset base, poor disaster planning, and preparedness capacities, limited capacity of government systems to support communities to prepare and recover from disaster shocks, Mukti is the first and so far the only NGO-effort addressing the issues of DRR.

**Asset bundles:** The project invested huge emphasis on - 1) increasing disaster preparedness at the household and community levels, and 2) strengthening the resilience of their livelihoods through protecting assets and eventually promoting long-term disaster risk reduction of the target communities.

On disaster preparedness, key activities were conducting participatory hazard analyses, strengthening early warning systems, maintaining consistent communication with the Upazila cyclone preparedness office, discussing standard response protocols with neighbours and peers, running mock cyclone preparation drills, developing disaster management/resilience plans.

Concisely, revising and rehearsing 'dos and don'ts' as per the Standing Order on Disaster (SoD) has been very well accomplished. All the individuals and groups asked about their roles



increasing household incomes through vegetable gardening, producing organic fertilizers and pesticides, protecting gardens from inundation and other adversities, poultry and cattle rearing, vaccination skills, developing champions from local people and facilitate

people have their alternative income, access to better nutrition, small savings to use in the time of crisis, the right skill set within their neighbours, networks with potential service providers.

**Endorsements from the beneficiaries:**

In two phases in a 3 years interval, we surveyed 625 households to record changes in their disaster response capacity, interviewed 30 individuals to understand their quotidian experiences, consulted key individuals like elected local representatives, traders, civil society members, key informants from government service departments and colleagues from the project to understand myriad perspectives.

I recorded notes from informal discussions and observations with anyone I encountered during my 6 weeks stays in Monpura. The changes Monpura people are through is enormous and has been captured in Mukti project reports. Instead of repeating those numbers, it would be more helpful to give an account of my observations to comprehend the meaning of those changes in peoples' lives. I began my career with a

development agency in early 2003 and since then my career oscillates between the development sector and academia. Over this time, I have never been to any project site where change is very visible and easily recognisable. Below is the summary of how people described the top two initiatives facilitated through Mukti:

**Agriculture:** When I first visited Monpura in summer 2016, the island was heavily dependent on the neighbouring Char Fashion for about 90% of its vegetable supply. In three years, these statistics reversed and now they hardly need to import any vegetable from outside. The households that have just the space to build their houses are squeezing out some space to grow one or two vegetable plants. This is not only supporting their regular kitchen supplies, but also giving them small income, which they are using for regular household maintenance, education for their children, and savings for the future.

Upazila Agriculture Officer has also recognized how this project contributed to revolutionising vegetable production in Monpura. Now, this practice has been spreading around to non-beneficiary households. Some farmers are also



**This approach empowered the participating beneficiaries and reciprocally assured their active engagement**

and responses during two consecutive cyclones in 2019, Roanu in May and Bulbul in November, and it turned out that they performed their training right. Project activities include livelihoods strengthening, diversifying and

peer-to-peer learning, connecting them with Upazila agriculture and livestock officers, small groups of savings and internal lending communities (SILC), small-scale infrastructure improvements, and reinforcing homes. Thus,

growing vegetables commercially and seeing successes.

Mukti did not only facilitate vegetable gardening, but also trained how to raise seedbeds to protect from heavy pouring and floodwater, to make organic fertilizers and pesticides, and so on. Now they are trained on disaster smart vegetable gardening. The achievements of demo farmers in small clusters have had a multiplier effect and, in the last year, more than 450 farmers proactively learned the techniques from the demo farmers and invested in their vegetable garden. This knowledge transfer has become a permanent legacy of Mukti and would inspire more farmers in years to come.

**Saving scheme:** One of the major recommendations in the baseline study was to look into options to facilitate access to finance in crisis. Following the process described at the beginning, they came out with a plan to assure better access to finance in a crisis, called Savings and Internal Lending Communities (SILC). It is worth mentioning here that locally there is a culture of distrust because of being a victim of financial forgery previously. However, SILC successfully re-established that sense of trust among local communities.

This is a very small saving scheme, managed by the committee elected from group members (contributors). Members could make low-interest loans for different needs. Also, they maintain a 30% reserve fund for cyclone periods. They are buying small assets and investing for business once the savings matured. People, particularly women, are having relatively better financial freedom than before, which is certainly contributing to their overall wellbeing. Besides, this idea is also gradually spreading around non-beneficiary groups.

Until February 2020, women in Utter Sakuchia Union ran two cycles of SILC. The first cycle started in February 2018 and 442 women saved Tk776,350 (each Tk1,756). After a year, when the first cycle ended, their total capital had risen to Tk962,484 (each Tk2,175).

In the first cycle, 310 members took a loan of Tk769,987 and used that money for household preparedness and disaster-resilient income-generating activities, ie vegetable cultivation, small business, poultry rearing, fishing net purchase, sewing machine purchase, and others. It has helped to increase women's capacity and status in their families. In the second cycle, which is up and running now, SILC's profit from lending has increased by 50% and the amount of per capita savings has in-



## In the first cycle, 310 members took a loan of Tk769,987 and used that money for household preparedness and disaster-resilient income-generating activities

creased by 46% from the first cycle. Many farmers are very grateful for this project and are tremendously inspired by this female-led saving groups, even thinking of upscaling this initiative.

Elements of locally-led adaptation:

As the story unfolds, Mukti strived to reduce disaster risk through adaptation and the project looked at the problem from a very bottom-up perspective, empowered people of the island to identify their issues, and jointly developed solutions. As echoed in Mukti, the fundamentals of locally-led adaptations are:

- 1) Emancipatory participation of local people all through the process,
- 2) Locally relevant activities designing
- 3) Setting realistic and achievable targets,
- 4) Enhancing peoples' capacity with transferable skills,
- 5) Having inbuilt flexibility to adjust activities to make them the right fit for people,
- 6) Developing a comprehensive approach to make possible connections with other subsets (ie, preparing the climate-smart seedbed, training of pesticide and fertilizer preparation, linking with markets and other services, linking with financial provisions, etc) of activities as portrayed in the above two examples,
- 7) Facilitating a friendly and accommodating learning environment.

The above points are elements of every single bundle of locally-led adaptation. This does not comprehend adaptation as an overall strategy for a place. Instead, adaptation is an ever-evolving process unfolded phase by phase. The above-mentioned narratives elaborate on what has been achieved.

In upcoming days, it is important to

scale up what brought good results for people, revise them to make them more relevant, and target some of the next level tasks. For example, in Monpura, fishing -- one of the means of income -- has not been seriously looked at to make the livelihood more resilient to potential onsets. Because the timing and availability of fisher folks do not match with conventional office hours. This was one of the major bottlenecks to have fisher folks on board in the Mukti initiative. There were a few activities with them around cyclone warning and distribution of lifesaving equipment. Apart from the fishermen issue, there are other areas to focus in the future as a part of a broader adaptation plan, such as:

- 1) Access to finance is one of the major issues in Monpura and there are opportunities to explore further on different potential financial services.
- 2) Inland fishing could be another unexplored area where several informants expressed their interests in.
- 3) So far, Mukti has its concentration around disaster risk reduction. It is important to expand the focus and revisit them under a climate change lens. In the future, climate-resilient livelihoods would be a necessary addition to the list of local adaptation.
- 4) Fortunately, there was no major environmental onset since 2016. Had there been a major stress, the scenario could be different. None from the beneficiaries could boldly affirm their capability to protect their assets and livelihoods should there be a major cyclone.
- 5) Watching Monpura against time was interesting, particularly when results showed exponential growth in the

production of vegetables, poultry, and livestock. Apart from revising them from the above three points, it is equally important to think of developing entrepreneurship at the local level, which would boost their economy and would give them much freedom to accrue their assets.

- 6) Following up on the last point, one of the major investments of SILC money is to buy jewellery, not to any direct investment for DRR or income boosting. It is important to provide them with information on how to use SILC money wisely.

In *Life on the Amazon*, Harris (2000) resists taking the concept of adaptation on board by posing a few questions -- does adaptation have any space for lived experiences of a disaster-prone area? Does it take account of the ongoing unpredictable nature of the relationship between humans and their surrounding environment? Where is the space for details of quotidian arrangements, trial, and error? The environment is not just one's surroundings, but also a bearer of symbolically and morally constituted relationships, which are experienced, lived in, and related to.

I would rather call this quotidian trial and errors locally-led adaptation. Because this is how adaptation measures have developed in human history. People have their continual engagement with the locality. They observe, sense, and judge those changes, and a reaction to that follows, primarily from peoples' active engagement and movement in the landscape. Inspired by Ingold (2000), Harris (2000: 18) notes,

"Indeed, the rhythm of life on the floodplain is centrally organised around the rise and fall of the river, year after year. Crucially, though, this does not mean people know in advance what will happen; a calendar cannot be produced to aid prediction. Instead, people rely on their perceptual abilities to gain information on changes in the environment. On this basis, they decide what to do, when to plant or reap the crops, when to catch a passing shoal of fish, or whatever."

Ultimately, adaptation needs to be conceptualized from a temporal scale as it evolves through time and consistently upgrades its look.

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# Enabling change

The urgency of fostering adaptation and resilience for a 1.5 degree future in the post pandemic world



PIXABAY

Riadadh Hossain, Shababa Haque, and Shahrin Mannan

**T**he year 2020, leading to COP26, is crucial for the global climate agenda. As we approach the first five-year milestone of the landmark Paris Agreement, countries are expected to submit their revised climate action plans, also known as the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), encapsulating their national commitments for achieving the 1.5C target.

Considering that the current NDC commitments fall short for meeting the set global target, countries must re-evaluate and improve on their Paris pledges in 2020 ahead of the summit. The upcoming COP26 must also resolve some of the unfinished discussions of

the previous year's negotiations, which includes issues such as finalizing Article 6 and deciding on suitable loss and damage financing. In light of the urgency, there is now a crucial need for both state and non-state actors across the globe to steer their actions towards transformational shifts to help ensure a more sustainable and resilient future for all.

In order to bridge the gap between parties and non-party stakeholders (ie primarily civil society organizations, private sector entities, intergovernmental organizations and grassroots representatives), and to provide better guidance to the UNFCCC secretariat, High-Level Champions (HLCs) have been appointed since COP 21. The role of the HLCs is to connect the initiatives and coalitions of non-party stakehold-

ers with national plans and strategies and thereby create opportunities for enhancing climate action. As such, in order to accelerate the ambitious adaptation and resilience actions across the globe, different countries and regions must communicate their specific needs and priorities to the designated HLC's prior to COP26.

South Asia is widely recognized as one of the major hotspots for climatic disasters, and this year the impact of climate change have been further exacerbated by the global Covid-19 pandemic, causing unprecedented challenges for the region. To make matters worse, the incidence of super-cyclone Amphan, heavy monsoon floods and consequent landslides in the past few months have wreaked further havoc, affecting more than 9.6 million people across Bangla-

desh, India and Nepal. The compounded impact of Covid-19 and climate-related shocks and stressors highlighted the pre-existing inequalities in the region and reiterated the need to strengthen climate action for resilience. As we approach COP26, it is thus pertinent that the HLCs are made aware of the regional context, and means to tackle this systemic crisis are brought to the foray of global climate negotiations.

To take this forward, changemakers in South Asia convened with the UK COP26 HLC, Nigel Topping, through a virtual dialogue event on September 17, 2020, with a view to discuss pressing needs and solution pathways for ensuring a resilient future for the region. Part of a regional dialogue series organized by Global Resilience Partnership (GRP) and the Marrakech Partnership for Global Climate Action (MPGCA), the event provided a unique platform for non-party stakeholders working on resilience and adaptation in South Asia to convey key messages to the HLC. The dialogue focused on the vital importance of promoting and scaling-up locally-led efforts on adaptation and resilience, through effectively mobilizing financial support and systematic, long-term and inclusive capacity development interventions.

Local community-led actions have long been instrumental in spearheading on-the-ground adaptation and resilience actions in the region. Several successful grassroots-led initiatives demonstrating women leadership and voluntary youth engagement across areas such as climate-resilient farming, ecosystem conservation, coastal protection, etc. were highlighted during the dialogue. However, the transformative potential of these efforts have been limited by a number of prevalent challenges. Local actors are often characterized by insufficient capacity, and lack of access to necessary information and resources. Moreover, effective channelization of finance to support local level needs continues to be a challenge. This can be attributed to complicated access modalities of global funds, issues of misallocation, and limited capacity of local governments to manage and disburse financial resources, among others.

As we lead up to COP26, it is essential to acknowledge the importance of local actors as enablers of change and empower them with the tools necessary for scaling up locally-led adaptation and resilience actions. This would entail strengthening their capacities for co-creation of evidence-driven solu-

tions, better integrating them within formal decision-making processes, and enabling access to necessary climate and weather-related information. Adequate, appropriate and effective delivery of finance to support these would also be absolutely critical, and the dialogue shed light on suitable modes and approaches for catalyzing finance for long-term adaptation and resilience in the region.

First, global funds must actively deliberate on long-term financial commitments, develop simpler access modalities, ensure fund allocation reflects context-specific needs and priorities and explore ways for channeling funds to the local level. Concurrently, recipients must also demonstrate enhanced transparency and accountability in or-

peer-to-peer funding platforms such as cooperatives and local community enterprises as well as social investment loans. Furthermore, the role of private sector financing and public-private partnership (PPP) in the climate action arena will be absolutely vital, particularly in the aftermath of Covid-19. As such, incentive mechanisms will need to be established for encouraging greater private sector investment towards adaptation and resilience actions in the region.

The South Asia Regional Dialogue served as a timely platform for a diverse set of regional stakeholders to exchange best practices and lessons learnt and to collectively deliver a set of key recommendations for promoting long-term, transformative adaptation and resil-



## Local community-led actions have long been instrumental in spearheading on-the-ground adaptation and resilience actions in the region

der to attract more funding support. To ensure finance flow reaches those who need the most, devolved financing mechanisms hold a lot of potentials. Doing so would require institutionalizing of climate finance within planning and budgeting processes of local governments, and accordingly building their capacity across different areas. This has to be complemented by good governance and enabling policies and legislations. The LAPAs established in Nepal represent a successful case of decentralizing finance at the local level.

There is also a need to identify and understand the suitability of different financial instruments for the region, and applied accordingly. To allow for flexible financing, multiple and diverse sources of financing has to be explored. This would include engaging and investing in microfinance institutions,

ience in the region. It is expected that the outcomes of the dialogue will contribute to the MPGCA resilience pathway and help explore how the HLCs and MPGCA can advance these ambitious actions through a potential Race for Resilience to COP26.

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# Youths at the forefront of rehabilitation efforts

The importance of locally-led youth initiatives



Sharnila Nuzhat Kabir and  
Farzad Abdullah Khan

With Bangladesh as the chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), all eyes are on the nation to pave the way towards effective locally-led solutions for climate change adaptation. The notion of impending loss and damage persistently looms over the heads of the local communities due to the recurrence of natural disasters. It is this notion that motivates local community members, especially the youth, to take an active stance in both disaster preparedness, and post-disaster rehabilitation efforts.

Earlier this year in May, when the landfall of Cyclone Amphan caused massive damage to coastal communities in Bangladesh, locally-led initiatives acted as the beacon of hope. More than 70,000 volunteers across the coastal belt played a pivotal role in ensuring cyclone preparedness through early warning announce-

ments and assisting in transportation to cyclone shelters.

Similarly, Nijera Kori's (NGO) Co-ordinator Khushi Kabir narrated how the locals of Polder-22 in Deluti Union, Paikgacha, Khulna rallied together to repair breached embankments and planned for community rehabilitation in the aftermath of the storm in a blog post on their website.

The embankments surrounding the polder got breached due to a lack of operation and maintenance by the authorities. As a result, 12 villages that had previously withstood both Cyclones Sidr and Aila went underwater for the first time. The landless groups within the polder came together to divert the saline water out of the polder, repaired the breaches, and also drafted a petition to the local government requesting accountability for the funds allocated for disaster preparedness.

When viewing the subject from an international perspective, Mauritius comes to mind. The nation was recently subject to a terrible oil spill, which

caused extensive ecological damage, including the death of at least 40 dolphins.

The damage, however, could have been much worse if it were not for the volunteer groups, primarily composed of thousands of community locals, both young and old, all activists to the core.

Homemade booms were created by the dozens, which were then deployed all along the coast with success, halting the expansion of slick and soaking up the oil; volunteers also transported at-risk marine life to the nearby island Ile aux Aigrettes.

The consensus by the community was that the government officials' response to this disaster was slow and inefficient, leading to communal protests. The authorities ended up being a deterrent for the cleanup response, through the restriction of volunteer access to the beach. The mitigation efforts could have gone more positively if there was more co-operation involved.

The above incidents highlight two

key details: the urgency and diligence a community-led initiative brings to the table in the face of disasters, as their personal lives are at stake. And the power a community has to push for effective disaster management to minimise loss and damage from future events.

The National Plan on Disaster Management (NPDM) 2016-2020 gives a strong emphasis on community-based efforts for reducing risks during disasters. The government of Bangladesh in association with various NGOs and donor agencies has successfully implemented multiple community-level Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) programs ranging from basic first aid training and knowledge building on evacuation practices to enabling protective measures such as tying down the roofs of homes.

Community-based early warning systems are one of the focus areas of Priority 4 of the NPDM. Strengthening these systems improves lead time before a disaster, helping to reduce livestock death and harvest loss;



## Over the years, community-led and youth-led initiatives have significantly reduced the impacts of natural disasters in Bangladesh's climate-vulnerable communities

tives are proving to be game-changers. Bangladeshi youth have been at the forefront of community rehabilitation, be it through grassroots level activism, or fundraising for relief efforts.

This Covid-19 pandemic alone saw hundreds of youth-led initiatives reaching out to the most marginalised communities ensuring food, hygiene, and protective equipment, and raising awareness on safe practices. Youth-led organisations like Bidyanondo, Resource Coordination Network Bangladesh (RCNB), and Pashe Acchi Initiative became popular names through their innovative relief efforts not only for Covid-19 victims but also those affected by Amphan, river erosion, and flooding.

Bidyanondo was one of the first youth-led organisations within Dhaka to rush to the frontlines to sanitize public transportation, alongside distributing face masks and sanitizer to the public and measuring their temperature to check for fever. They also distributed cooked food amongst un-

and supporting victims of river erosion and flooding.

Similarly, Pashe Achi Initiative's project Gronthomohol helped to support booksellers in the capital's Nilkhet affected due to lockdown by creating an online marketplace for books.

Another example of the youth's resilience was seen in May and June this year when the local community and youths rushed to assist farmers in Haor areas during harvesting as there was a shortage of labour due to movement restrictions.

Why these small-scale local initiatives are particularly crucial in this pandemic context is because they filled the gaps that larger institutions like NGOs and the government could not fill. Their solutions were creative and tailor-made to the community's needs, and the community-centric approach allowed for these efforts to be more mobile even in lockdown conditions.

Even in disaster management, youth initiatives play a large role. Perhaps the best example of what the

efforts, and relocate citizens to shelters; It also underlines how far these youth initiatives can go once backed by their respective governments.

UNICEF's Children and Disaster Risk Reduction report found that putting children and youths at the centre of DRR planning efforts allows for more creative and enthusiastic solutions. They also tend to be more persuasive, with adults becoming more receptive to their opinions. Thus the youth have been given a valued voice in decision-making, with local committees now encouraging youth leaders to be integrated into planning processes.

Be it taking to the streets demanding climate action or bringing the community together in the face of a disaster; the youth are acting as catalysts for positive environmental practices. Such community-centric initiatives should be given the spotlight in creating a nationwide movement to inspire and reach the proverbial tipping point in shifting mindsets towards more environmentally-conscious practices. ●

and allowing relevant stakeholders to prepare the necessary response, including rescue and relief operations.

Not only are early warning systems competent in the case of cyclone preparedness but also floods and other disasters such as earthquakes and landslides. Some initiatives by the government include the training of Urban Community Volunteers in search-and-rescue and first aid, training on safe construction to masons and construction workers, and school safety and evacuation drills.

What these capacity building initiatives amongst locals try to do is create a social movement within the community to come together and work cohesively towards a common goal through meaningful participation. Over the years, community-led and youth-led initiatives have significantly reduced the impacts of natural disasters in Bangladesh's climate-vulnerable communities.

It is not just those at immediate or ongoing risk who are carrying out such activities; urban youth groups also play a massive role in raising awareness on environmental issues. The importance of the social outreach of youth in today's climate is immeasurable. With social media tools and networks in place, youth-led initia-



derprivileged communities.

RCNB used its vast network both within Bangladesh and abroad to better allocate monetary resources for grassroots initiatives. Through their fundraising efforts and virtual concert 'Music Against Hunger,' they assisted in funding a plethora of projects such as distributing oxygen cylinders in local hospitals, providing food relief to sex-workers and transgenders, and rebuilding houses affected by Amphan,

youth can do once given the responsibility and the tools to face disaster management is the World Organization of the Scout Movement. A multinational organisation, Bangladesh is one of its more sizable constituents with over 1.5 million members. Globally, these Scouts receive training in disaster preparedness and management techniques through routine drills. During the annual floods, these Scouts are called in to help with flood control

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# First South Asian regional office of the GCA opens in Dhaka

The Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA) regional office was inaugurated through a virtual event



GLOBAL  
COMMISSION ON  
ADAPTATION

Samina Islam

**T**he Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA) is an international organization hosted by the Government of Netherlands that acts as a solutions broker to accelerate, innovate and scale up adaptation action for a climate resilient world. The GCA is building a set of worldwide networks of regional offices. Last year, they opened their first regional office in Beijing. Through these networks, the centre aims to support the policy activities, research and communications, governments and private sectors in developing and scaling adaptation actions.

The Global Centre on Adaptation (GCA) regional office was inaugurated through a virtual event on 8 September 2020 by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Ban Ki-moon, the 8th Secretary-General of the UN and Chairman

of the GCA. Matt Rutte, Prime Minister of Netherlands, Dr Patrick V Verkooijen, CEO of the GCA, and regional ministers from across South Asia were also present at the online event.

Last year in July, during the Dhaka meeting of the Global Commission on Adaptation, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and Ban Ki-moon mutually agreed to establish the GCA regional office in Bangladesh. This decision came from Bangladesh's growing commitment to tackling the climate crisis, its global leadership in addressing the challenges of climate change, and exemplary success in adaptation measures against climate adversities.

The new office of the GCA will be located at the new building of the Department of Environment in Agargaon, Dhaka. The Centre will work with and support the South Asian governments, leaders, experts, investors, and communities in strengthening and scaling

adaptation actions to tackle the climate emergency.

The goal of the Global Centre on Adaptation, as mentioned by Patrick Verkooijen, CEO of the GCA, is "to provide urgent and cost-effective ways to help communities across South Asia, particularly at the local level by the combined expertise and resources of the partners of GCA." The main focus of GCA is to share knowledge and expertise on climate change adaptation with a stronger focus on locally-led adaptation.

Ban Ki-moon applauded Bangladesh's effective adaptation methods that helped save thousands of lives over the years against extreme climate events and stated that "Bangladesh is a striking example of how vulnerable communities can be the most innovative in adaptation through climate change."

Mark Rutte, Prime Minister of the



It is estimated that the economy of Bangladesh has suffered a total loss of Tk249 million due to landslides for the years 2009 to 2014

Netherlands praised Bangladesh's early warning system and effective measures to tackle Cyclone Amphan when explaining the need for climate adaptation and resilience. He also said that "If investments are made in adaptation now, we will be better prepared for climate change down the line. It will cost money but the long-term benefit will far outweigh the short-term cost."

Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina invited the countries to enhance their nationally determined contributions by December 31 this year in tackling the climate threats and execute the 2015 Paris Agreement. She also hoped that the regional office will serve as a "centre of excellence" for adaptation measures in South Asia by sharing and exchanging knowledge about adaptation practices of the regional countries.

The launching event of the GCA regional office was followed by two events - a press conference and the first annual GCA South Asia Partnership Forum. The partnership forum included key stakeholders and leading experts from across South Asia who provided their thoughts and perspectives on the GCA Bangladesh office.

GCA has developed five priority areas to work in South Asia. The first one is evidence-based decision making where GCA aims to provide systemized data solutions that are relevant for adaptation as well as work on a data platform that will be a tool to share data and knowledge. This knowledge and experience sharing between countries will have a central focus on adaptation plans and practices across South Asia.

The second focus area of the GCA is to support locally-led adaptation and actions in Bangladesh and replicate it across the South Asian region. This includes mobilizing funds to expand the resources for LLA, supporting partners to develop and strengthen policies and structures for LLA as well as working with grassroots communities, universities, national and local governments to develop a bottom-up adaptation learning mechanism.

Another priority area is to build and develop a resilient infrastructure based on Nature-based Solutions. In the Global Commissions report, there is a notion - "Every one dollar invested in Nature-based Solutions results in ten dollar returns or investments." In Bangladesh, coastal afforestation is a primary example of investment in NbS. The goal of GCA is to support and accelerate the practice of NbS regionally and globally. Ken O'Flaherty in this regard stated that "There are significant

opportunities to put nature at the heart of climate action particularly in the areas of adaptation and resilience; and regional cooperation will be crucial in this scenario."

GCA also aims to develop approaches that focus on water intervention in urban areas. "In the upcoming 5 years, GCA plans to, directly and indirectly, support national governments and urban authorities to accelerate and scale urban climate adaptation," said by Patrick Verkooijen.

GCA is committed to ensuring that the climate budget is prioritized and mainstreamed. Judith Herbertson, Development Director of FCDO stressed that "LLA needs to be matched with funding, expertise and local government to achieve the transformation needed."

One of the most significant parts of the event was the launch of the Global Youth Adaptation Network. GCA will work to build and support youth leadership and keep young people at the centre of this adaptation agenda. The Youth Adaptation Network will serve as a platform for connecting youth from South Asia with their counterparts around the globe to engage, empower, and inspire each other to take the lead in climate resilience.

Saima Wazed Hossain, Thematic Ambassador, Climate Vulnerable Forum launched the YAN and said, "Young people act as powerful agents of change and are needed now more than ever to bring in their new ideas and visions to make a difference in the communities. They can help develop adaptation solutions and many of them are already doing that in the communities."

Dr Saleemul Huq, Director of International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and Senior Advisor of the GCA also stated regarding this issue, "The young people of our region are going to be the solution of the climate problem."

Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world and despite that it has become a prominent leader in climate adaptation and resilience. The GCA Bangladesh office will provide greater opportunities for the country to scale up and strengthen its community and locally-led adaptation strategies by giving the country as well as the region more exposure to the global communities.

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The GCA Bangladesh office will provide greater opportunities for the country to scale up and strengthen its community and locally-led adaptation strategies by giving the country as well as the region more exposure to the global communities

# Communities leading from the frontline

Story of adaptation from a vulnerable community

Adnan Qader and Mahia Rahman

The flooding that swamped Bangladesh recently within weeks of erratic rainfall is a stark signal that Bangladesh's weather extremes will continue to get worse in the coming years.

Though several factors influence flooding, our changing climate is a stressor that is exacerbating this process. A third of Bangladesh is underwater after some of the heaviest rains in a decade which started in June and the water is yet to subside. In North-central Bangladesh, the Brahmaputra river was almost 40cm (15.7 inches) higher than normal and threatening to burst through its banks, an Aljazeera report said. Most villagers were trying to stay

Mamun Rashid is originally from Dhanut Upazilla in Bogra. At 26 years of age, he had left behind his wife and three children to work in as a caretaker at a house in Dhaka. Now, 49 years old and adapted to life in the capital, he often gets anxious phone calls from home, especially in times of such crises. Bogra has six major rivers flowing through it and is no stranger to flooding. In June this year, however, the effects of the natural disaster were different than usual. His house, with bamboo walls and tin roof, had gone underwater.

"My main concern was that my family is homeless right now. Even if it is temporary, they still needed a place to relocate until we can move back home," Mamun said. Mamun immediately asked his employers for leave so he could go and help manage the crisis with his family. There were 23 more houses which were severely affected by the flood. Union members were waiting for the water to retreat before they could come to a unanimous decision on how to reduce the detrimental effects of the floods. Locals had used sandbags stacked up in front of their houses to prevent more water from getting inside as an immediate measure. However, this process is slow and uncertain, given the magnitude of the flooding.

By the time Mamun reached home, he witnessed that not only his residential area but also much of the cropland was underwater. This would destroy all of his harvest, meaning that this year the flood would also have a huge economic impact in their lives.

Under Mamun's and his community's joint effort, locals came together first to make a secure place in a faraway dry land to store their necessary belongings. They had made cooking arrangements and were also going out to collect clean drinking water daily in groups.

Floods were annual in the Northern parts of Bangladesh and some adjustment methods were already in practice for years. These networks of flood action team helped save whatever belongings they had and created a makeshift haven until authorities could take

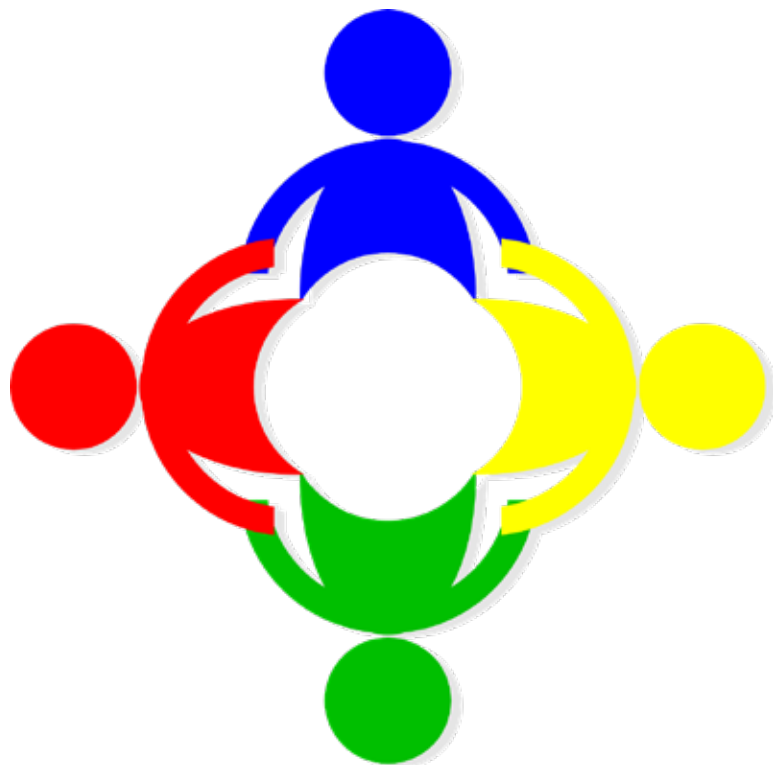


Without the solidarity of the people, he or anyone else would not have been able to save their livelihoods and belongings

proper action. "Our neighbours, people from nearby villages were also allowing us to keep our livestock there and helped with feeding and keeping them alive," he said. Without the solidarity of the people, he or anyone else would not have been able to save their livelihoods and belongings - especially during this pandemic when they are already facing financial difficulties.

Many communities that are vulnerable to climate change impact have been dealing with climate variability for decades and have a wealth of knowledge about how to adapt. Community-based adaptation to climate change focuses on empowering communities to use their own knowledge and decision-making processes to take action. Such actions are creating locally-led adaptation to such adversities especially during the time of crises.

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near their flood-damaged homes, but some 15,000 had fled severely affected areas. Although there are many adversities during such crises, communities continue to come together to help each other. This story is about Mamun Rashid and his network of rapid flood action team.