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RESILIENCE AND CAPACITY BUILDING

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CAP-RES: Building Climate Resilience in Bangladesh through Capacity Building, Innovation and Advocacy

Maria Aktar, Juel Mahmud and Tamanna Hannan

Climate change is a pressing issue for Bangladesh. Since 1990, 95% of its major disasters have been attributed to climate-related causes. However, Bangladesh is known as a global pioneer in climate change adaptation, however vulnerable communities need support to enhance their resilience consistently. This can be achieved by developing their leadership skills, involving them in decision-making, and learning from their climate change adaptation practices. A combination of capacity building skills, research and advocacy can achieve this goal.

Given the circumstances and with the long-term experience on climate change issues for vulnerable communities, the International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), is implementing a project known as "Capacity strengthening of multi-Actors to limit climate change impacts and Enhance resilience- (CAP-RES)" to fill the knowledge gaps on climate change issues that exist in local, regional and national level; and thereby capacitating multi-actors (such as researchers, NGOs, CBOs, private sectors, government officials, think tanks, universities, schools, etc.) to take up leadership in climate action.

BASIC INFO OF THE PROJECT

Title: "Capacity strengthening of multi-Actors to limit climate change impacts and Enhance resilience- (CAP-RES)"
In Collaboration with: the Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB)
Project Duration: 48 months (01 Jan'23 to 31 Dec'26)
Total Budget: 12 Million SEK (120 Million BDT)
Funded by: Embassy of Sweden, Dhaka

Figure-1: Basic info of the project:
The project CAP-RES is designed with three objectives shown in Figure 1 diagram.

Figure 1: Project goal and objective

> "This can be achieved by developing their leadership skills, involving them in decision-making, and learning from their climate change adaptation practices"

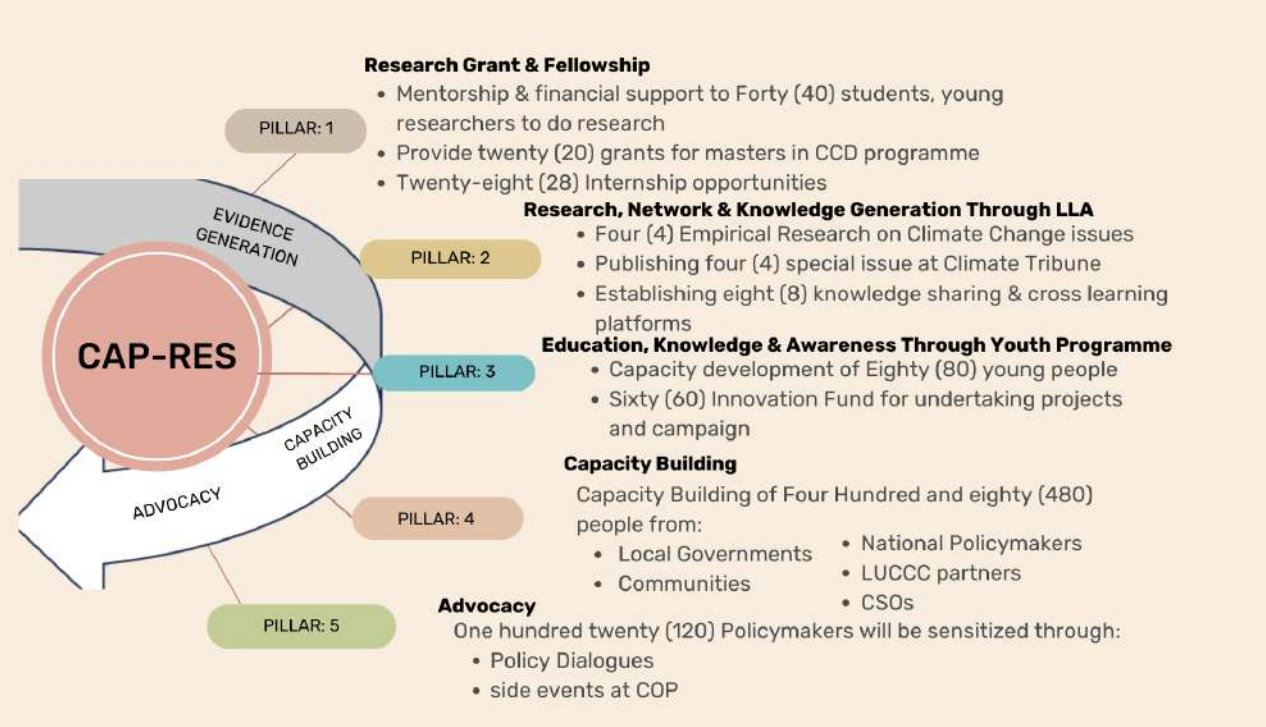

Figure 2: Projects Activities

In line with these three objectives, the project plans to conduct five major activities and play a comprehensive role in strengthening climate resilience. **Figure 2 outlines this.**

The nexus between objectives, activity, and strength resilience:

Figure 3 illustrates the interconnected relationship and synergy between three key objectives. "Capacity building" is a central goal, directly advanced by activity pillars 3 and 4, both of which emphasize enhancing the capabilities of diverse individuals through training, workshops, policy dialogues, internships, and more.

"The generation of evidence" is another important objective, primarily addressed by activity pillars 1 and 2, which focus on providing funding for research, projects, and campaign ideas led by young researchers, university students, and clubs.

The final objective, "advocacy," is accomplished by engaging policy-makers at local, national, and international levels through events associated with the Conference of the Parties (COP).

Below all the activities are explained for detailed understanding-

Figure 3: The nexus between objectives, activity, and strength resilience

Research Grant and Fellowship:

Aims to generate ground evidence of climate change reality and gaps through research for feeding into policy advocacy. A total of 60 university students and young researchers representing various regions of the country will receive comprehensive financial and technical backing to carry out 60 distinct research initiatives. This initiative foresees the researchers contributing to the discourse on critical climate change. In the current year, 15 researchers are pursuing various topics in the field of climate change.

> “The project’s final activity involves organizing a policy dialogue to address issues identified through research”

Furthermore, this program offers internship opportunities for sixteen graduate and master’s level students and; provide research grants to enhance the capacity and skill sets of these individuals to support their future careers in the field of climate change.

Education, Knowledge, and Awareness through Youth Programme:
CAP-RES acknowledges the vital role of the younger generation in tackling the climate crisis. The project empowers youth with climate change expertise via workshops, classes, excursions, COP event participation, policy discussions, and seed funds for project implementation. By engaging youth in knowledge-building, CAP-RES aims to harness their energy, creativity, and commitment to a sustainable future.

Importantly, the 120 well-trained youth will share this knowledge in their communities, inspiring other young individuals to engage in climate change initiatives.. Since the project emphasizes local implementation, it will also spotlight local leadership and the practice of locally led adaptation

Research, Network & Knowledge Generation:
CAP_RES has designed five in-depth research on locally led adaptation (LLA) and loss and damage (L&D) through keeping the local governments and communities, youth and women at the heart of the research objectives.

This year the project initiated its research on “Exploring Village Common Forest (VCF):
Assessing the Impacts of Climate Change and Sustainable Management through Indigenous Community’s Participation”. The prime focus of the research study is to identify the climate-induced challenges related to the livelihoods of the local inhabitants of the Chittagong hill tracts region and understand their dependency on natural resources. The initial survey findings suggest that climate change has negatively impacted the livelihood of indigenous communities and influenced the dependency on VCF resources.

Besides longitudinal studies, the online platforms, publication, knowledge dissemination platforms, such as the National Platform of Locally led Adaptation (LLA) would play a vital role in following up on the uptake of its research findings towards action and advocacy.

Capacity Building:
CAP-RES focuses on strengthening the capacities of these stakeholders through resilience building. The project enhances the capacity of Civil Society Organizations (CSOs) in Loss and Damage (L&D) and Locally Led-Adaptation (LLA) arena, enabling their active participation in policy discussions and adaptation measures..

Advocacy:
The project’s final activity involves organizing a policy dialogue to address issues identified through research. This brings together stakeholders for constructive discussions, fostering a shared understanding on exploring solutions. The dialogue facilitates the exchange of perspectives, experiences, and collective brainstorming for potential actions. It sensitizes national policymakers to co-generate knowledge, making it easier to advocate for policy changes or implement practical measures supporting local Led-Adaptation (LLA) and addressing Loss and Damage (L&D).

In conclusion, the CAP-RES project offers an innovative and holistic approach to tackling Bangladesh’s climate challenges. Recognizing the nation’s vulnerability, it addresses these issues through research, capacity building, youth involvement, and evidence-based advocacy. By empowering various stakeholders and youth, the project fills knowledge gaps and fosters climate action leadership.Through policy dialogues and engagement with national leaders, CAP-RES converts research into practical solutions. This integrated strategy holds promise for a more sustainable and resilient future in the face of climate challenges.■

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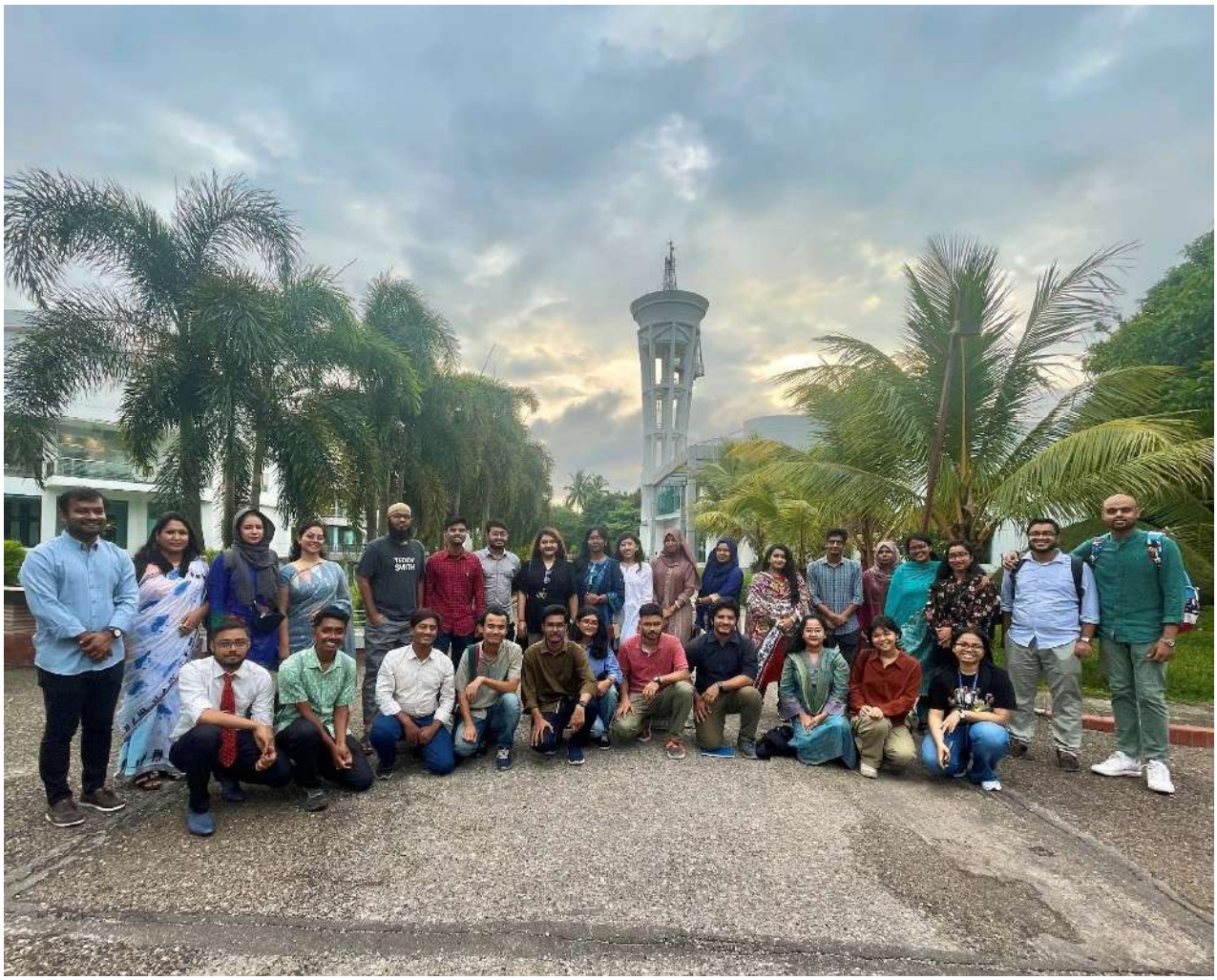

Residential Workshop with ICCCAD Youth Fellows 2023 COURTESY PHOTO

Youth for Change

Unlocking potential of future generation: ICCCAD's Youth Capacity Development Initiative for Climate Resilience

Angela Patricia Rivera Galvis

Addressing the issues of climate change in this era of 'global boiling' has become paramount in shaping a sustainable future and here- youth's involvement is very crucial. The younger generation possesses a unique perspective to mitigate the challenges they will face in the next few years due to climate change. The ever-growing problems may not see light soon at the end of the tunnel but ICCCAD's youth programme seeks to engage the youth and children of Bangladesh and beyond to come forward under one Banyan tree, regardless of gender to learn, understand, and share aspects of environmental and social problems of climate change through capacity building. ICCCAD's youth programme understands the urgency of youth involvement in the identification of challenges and solutions to adapt to the impacts of climate change.

Youth Engagement for climate action can be a key driving

force in propelling climate action forward. Young people are not only the victims of the consequences of the older generation but also, they can be powerful changing agents by claiming their own rights. Their fresh ideas of cutting-edge innovative solutions can bring change to the table that will not only challenge the status quo but also push more to sustainable practices from the tech industry to policy making. The potential of young people to mobilize the governments and hold institutions accountable for their environmental responsibilities can be noteworthy. By being more conscious about the right to speak, young individuals are instilling hope to make climate action more impactful for generations to come.

ICCCAD's youth programme encourages young people to take on leadership roles and contribute to building climate change awareness. It offers opportunities for education and discussion on environmental and social issues, recognizing the importance of youth participation in problem identification and solution. This program's objective is to strengthen the ability of young people who are concerned about the environment and have some background knowledge on climate change and environmental management.

ICCCAD's Youth Programme empowers young minds to confront the crisis head-on. Through initiatives like Youth Retreat, Climate Youth Initiative, and RISE, ICCCAD has nurtured over 120 youths nationwide. These passionate individuals now spearhead climate initiatives globally. Beyond enhancing capacities, ICCCAD prioritizes meaningful youth engagement in climate advocacy. The Youth Fellowship program creates platforms for dialogues and conferences, fostering a new generation's active participation in vital climate discussions..

This year, ICCCAD's youth program offered 20 youths from 14 districts of Bangladesh, with a 6-month fellowship under the CAP-RES project. The learning process began with a 3-day workshop introducing peers, motivating meaningful 6-month engagement, and providing basic climate change understanding - including impacts on gender and youth, adaptation, climate justice, loss and damage. Following this, a field visit to eye witnessing climate change impacts firsthand at Mongla and Paikgasa, two climate vulnerable areas in Bagerhat and Khulna districts were conducted. This practical experience aimed to equip fellows with knowledge and drive them to lead community resilience projects in their home regions. Additionally, 6 online training sessions gave them the opportunity to acquire advanced knowledge on environment and climate that will help them in negotiations, climate advocacy, and understanding future career options in the climate change and development sector. The sessions included topics of environmental security, youth actions on climate justice, loss & damage, locally-led adaptation, climate negotiation, and careers in the climate change sector.

The youth leadership programme of the CAP-RES project also trained 20 youth climate negotiators through its 6 months of fellowship programme. This gave them a platform to learn about climate negotiation and contribute to national-level policy formulation and implementation. Late Dr. Saleemul Huq's vision was to empower young individuals in the field of climate change to play a crucial role in the future, advocate for themselves, and disseminate knowledge to others

The CAP-RES project has allocated SEK 600,000 to fund youth-led climate action projects across three categories - ICCCAD Fellows, University Clubs, and individual youth or groups under "Youth Innovation Fund" selected through a rigorous and multi-stage process. The grant winners developed innovative proposals for financial and technical support. Grantees' initiatives involved collaborating with schools on climate education, creating knowledge products like an atlas, running campus green drives, and more. Additionally, the project provides opportunities for two youth fellows to represent ICCCAD at COP28 this year in Dubai. Ultimately, it aims to catalyze youth to drive solutions and become empowered climate changemakers.

> If we invest properly in capacitating our young girls and boys to become adaptation experts, they can not only help their own countries adapt but can also share that knowledge with countries around the world.
>
> **Prof. Dr. Saleemul Huq,** OBE

ICCCAD Youth fellows on a field visit to Sundarban

COURTESY PHOTO

> “The founder and climate champion, late Dr. Saleemul Huq emphasized on empowering individuals to become advocates and knowledge spreaders on climate change”

The founder and climate champion, late Dr. Saleemul Huq emphasized on empowering individuals to become advocates and knowledge spreaders on climate change. Hence, to keep Dr. Huq’s legacy, ICCCAD aims to continuously foster the next generation of climate leaders through ongoing mentorships, future negotiator and policymaker connections, and youth climate leadership platforms in Bangladesh and beyond. ■

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Strengthening Local Leadership for Natural Resource Management: Exploring Village Common Forest (VCFs)

Ensuring Sustainability through Local Leadership and Community Engagement

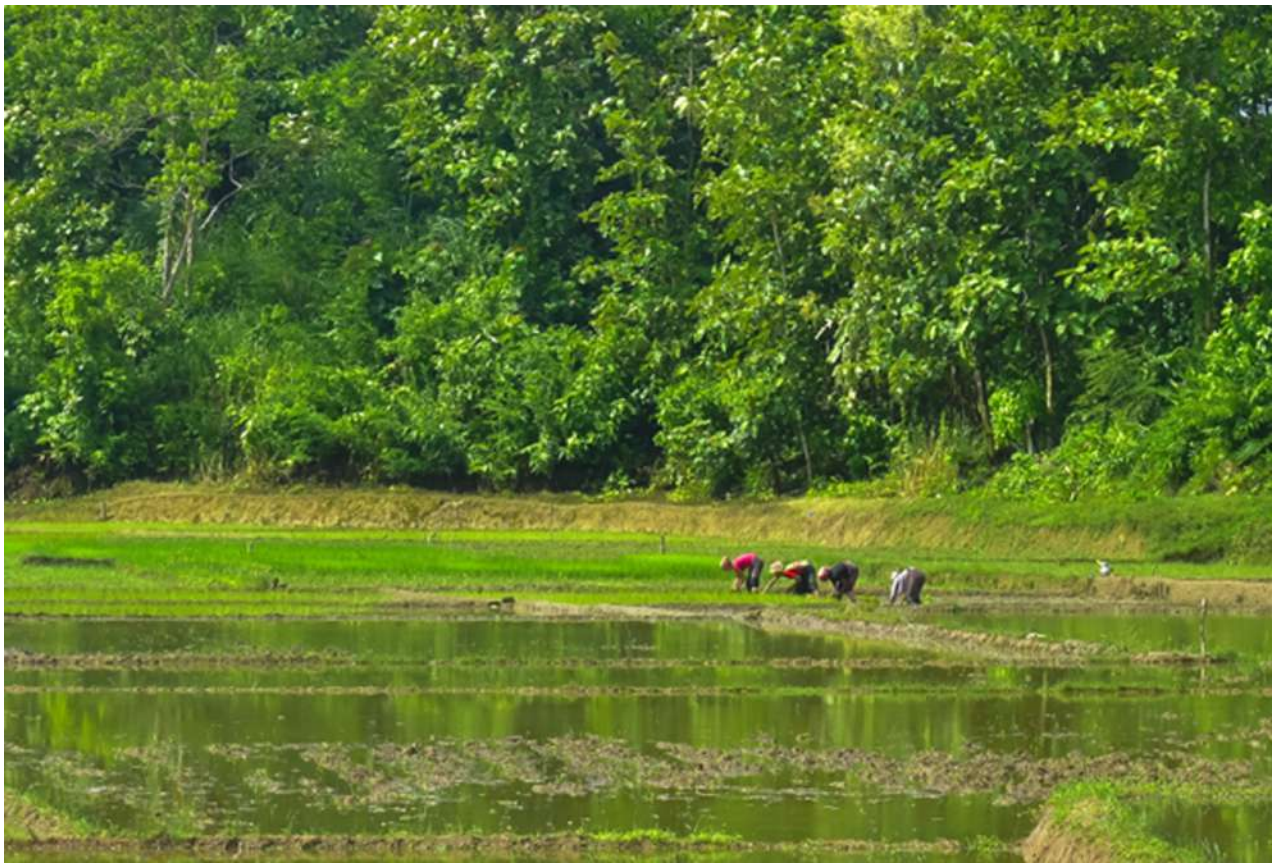
Savio Rousseau Rozario, Rawnak Jahan Khan Ranon, and Mahira Nazniba Rodoshee

Local Leadership: Why does it matter?

Local leadership is the key to implement and succeed any development measures at ground level, and understanding the lived experience of the community. A local leader can be an individual or a local institution; well-recognized, socially accepted, and regarded by the local community. It is expected that the person or the entity would work for the community dedicatedly and transparently, and possess the ability and experience to engage and influence the community "to do something better" collectively. Local leaders are to be the 'change makers' for the communities, and their activities should be exemplary for generations to follow.

However, at the individual level, there remain challenges in electing the local leader as it can be politically, economically, and socially influenced. To avoid this, there needs to be a non-biased, proper intra-representation at the local level in choosing the 'Local Leader' because "not everyone can be a good leader, but a good leader can come from anywhere."

"A local leader can be an individual or a local institution; well-recognized, socially accepted, and regarded by the local community"



RANON, 2023

In this article, we focused on the importance of local leadership and good governance in natural resource management. We tried to highlight a locally-led natural resource conservation practice from the remote parts of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region. The ancestral practice is known as Village Common Forest (VCFs), a traditional way of conserving the forest by the indigenous communities. Our study, supported by the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (SIDA), tried to explore the traditional management system of VCFs and the existing challenges that prevail in the conservation efforts.

Local Leadership in Natural Resource Management

There are a significant number of cases around the world, where local communities under proper leadership and guidance have been managing natural resources competently. For instance, local leadership helped to resolve conflicts over natural resources through equal distribution of resources and services in the Okongo community from Namibia. Another study from Eastern Serbia found efficient leadership enhancing the 'quality of living' of the local community, as well as ensuring sustainable forest resource management. Again, the local community leaders of the Miao people from China restricted the abuses of decentralizing policies by the local bureaucrats and traders and maintained the traditional ways of forest conservation. Likewise, a significant number of indigenous communities residing in the CHT region are greatly dependent on, and are actively engaged in Village Common Forest (VCF) practice; a sustainable forest management model opined by different experts and scholars of the environment and climate change arena.

> "In this article, we focused on the importance of local leadership and good governance in natural resource management"

> For decades, need-based resource use and sustainable extraction have been practiced in the VCFs to protect natural resources from depletion

The Village Common Forests (VCF's)

The genesis of Village Common Forests (VCFs) dates back to the colonial era when the local indigenous communities residing in CHT, Bangladesh, lost their accessibility to forest resources. Almost four-fifths of the forest land was declared as reserved forests (RF) by the authority in the early 1900s. This exclusion and top-down approach to forest management failed to conserve forest resources in the long run, resulting in a conflict of interest between local communities and the forest department. As a result, the indigenous people embraced traditional resource management practices to safeguard their remaining scarce forest resources, which are known as Mouza Reserves or Village Common Forests (VCFs).

Maintaining the VCF's through Local Leadership and Community Engagement

VCFs are the lifeline for many indigenous communities living in remote parts of CHT. VCFs have been protecting the water bodies and ensuring the sustainable flow of water; and fulfilling the environmental, medicinal, cultural, and religious needs of the indigenous people. Besides, multiple studies report that VCFs also create alternative income generation options.

For decades, need-based resource use and sustainable extraction have been practiced in the VCFs to protect natural resources from depletion. Such practice is governed and executed by the local leader also known as the Karbaris. VCFs are established based on customary rules and regulations, serving as compelling illustrations of successful community-based forest management practices. But with growing social, political, and environmental challenges, the unsustainable resource consumption of VCFs is being observed.

Ensuring Sustainability of VCF's

The initial findings from our study identify the following reasons to be some of the major challenges that are threatening the existence of the VCFs. VCFs are yet subjected to proper recognition and attribution. The contribution of the local indigenous communities in preserving the forest is yet to be acknowledged legally. Such factors lead to overexploitation of natural resources from the VCFs, and privatizing the forest area for agriculture, horticulture, and plantation is a growing threat.

Secondly, there has been a lack of alternative livelihood options and income-generation opportunities. This is leading to the overexploitation of natural resources. We also observed that the condition of the VCFs vary across the region. This greatly depends on leadership and good governance, which can be a critical factor to assure sustainability.

Finally, the impact of climate change in the form of erratic rainfall, excessive heat, and changes in the seasonal pattern has been affecting the agricultural practices and yield in the region. As a result, the dependency on forest-based resources is also increasing.

However, with proper support from the local legislative authority such challenges can be addressed and reduced. There is a strong need to support the capacity of the local leaders involved in forest conservation activities. Formal recognition of their efforts and involvement of the local communities in safeguarding the forest resources will not only benefit the entire natural ecosystem but also create income generation opportunities. Initiatives like proper monitoring systems with the involvement of the local communities can be a good initiative. In the face of limited access to livelihood, establishing roads and developing the communication system can be considered as a window of opportunities for VCF dependent people. In terms of boosting climate-resilient agricultural practices, extensive research can be undertaken to introduce stress-tolerant varieties of crops that are endemic to the region. ■

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Unleashing Youth Power for Climate Resilience

ICCCAD's Youth Fellowship Journey of 2023

Md. Fahim Hossain and Preety Tanchangya

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

-Lao Tzu

We never thought applying to be an ICCCAD Youth Fellow could lead us to a journey of exploration and making lifetime memories.Our fellowship journey kicked off with a residential program at BRAC CDM in Gazipur, Dhaka. We started our first day at the residential workshop with an interesting ice-breaking session which created a friendly environment for learning. The knowledge session began with Sumaiya Binte Selim, Program Coordinator-Gender, ICCCAD who briefed us on what to expect from the next three days. She also enlightened us on the different dimensions of climate change through the lens of gender and youth. We participated in an open discussion to share our views on climate change and the stories we bring together in the room.

On the second day, we delved deeper into the overview of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Structure (UNFCCC) with S M Saify Iqbal, Program Coordinator-Capacity Building at ICCCAD. We learned about different components of the UNFCCC process to address climate change issues. The learning got interesting when we got divided into two teams representing developing nations and developed nations to take part in a discussion. We were able to put ourselves into different shoes and understand how perspective changes in such complex climate negotiation issues.

In the evening, we had an engaging session on Locally Led Adaptation by Afsara Binte Mirza - Research Officer at ICCCAD. After the overview of the concept, we participated in a social inclusion game where we had to take part in role-playing activities. We took on the roles of different persons in a village that got hit by a cyclone. This activity helped us to realize the thinking pattern of the villagers and how can a village build resilience in a climate disaster area by uniting as a community. Afterwards, Nusrat Naushin, Programme Coordinator- Loss & Damage, ICCCAD shed light on the pressing concept of Loss and Damage in the context of climate change. We realized how important it is to realize the sheer impact of climate change across regions and how to address it.

In the evening, Prof. Dr. Saleemul Huq joined us online to share his words of wisdom and answer our queries. I (Fahim) asked him how we can deal with eco-anxiety and keep up hope when the pace of climate change has been accelerating and creating massive loss and damage. He emphasized the importance of solidarity and working together in this common fight. He also shed light on the non-economic loss & damage that should be measured and taken into account.

> “We were able to put ourselves into different shoes and understand how perspective changes in such complex climate negotiation issues”

ICCCAD Youth fellows listening to Dr. Huq's Concluding Remarks PHOTO: COURTESY

The closing session was facilitated by Juel Mahmud, Project Manager of CAP-RES Project and he emphasized the next steps of the fellowship program. We had a cultural night on our last day and it was filled with stunning performances.

After the residential workshop we had the opportunity to participate in a field trip to Khulna. We visitedMongla, located in the Southern coastal belt of Bangladesh and witnessed various urban development initiatives related to addressing climate change and their impact on informal settlements in the Mongla municipal area.

While exploring Mongla, the persistent challenge of saline intrusion reducing access to drinkable water was highlighted the most. During our visit to Signal Tower Colony, we learned about a project titled 'Building climate resilient migrant-friendly towns through locally-led adaptation in Bangladesh.' The project focuses on the specific needs of migrants residing in informal settlements within Mongla. The project underscores the importance of locally-led adaptation, emphasizing the significance of the community's involvement in designing and implementing solutions.

"After the residential workshop we had the opportunity to participate in a field trip to Khulna"

The second day of our field visit was dedicated to conducting surveys and connecting with the local community. On our third day of the field visit to Paikgasa, we set out to discover more about this ancient and renowned upazila in the Khulna district of Bangladesh. We reached

Fellows used scrambled words to describe their fellowship journey

PHOTO: COURTESY

> “Upon returning from our field visits, we engaged in a group activity to discuss our observations and brainstorm ideas for possible solutions to the challenges faced by the local community”

Shanta Ghat, where we visited the climate-vulnerable community and learned about their adaptation strategies. We had the opportunity to witness the shrimp hatchery, a crucial component of the local economy, and the cultivation of salinity-resilient crop variants, cyclone shelters and a water purification facility which plays a vital role in ensuring access to clean and safe drinking water for the community.

Upon returning from our field visits, we engaged in a group activity to discuss our observations and brainstorm ideas for possible solutions to the challenges faced by the local community. The day concluded with a group presentation, where each team shared its three days’ worth of observations and findings.

The learnings from this fellowship reminded us of the late Dr. Huq who said, “You can join the ICCCAD family but cannot leave it.” Now we realize the meaning of his words and how we crafted a long-lasting bond in our fellowship journey that will inspire us to build a climate-resilient future for Bangladesh. ■

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UNSPLASH

Empowering Local NGOs:

Bridging Capacity Gaps for Climate Change Action

Addressing Capacity Gaps and Needs of Local NGO Professionals in Rowmari, Kurigram to Address Climate Change

Habibur Rahman, Nafis Imtiaj Hossain and **S M Saify Iqbal**

The precarious pace and impacts of climate change is making it tougher to build capacities of local communities and grassroot organizations who are at the frontlines. However, capacity building is a vital enabler of climate change adaptation. In Bangladesh, the importance of capacity building has been emphasized, and incorporated in the existing national policies and plans including the National Adaptation Plan (NAP), Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), and Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCPP). Moreover, article 11 of the Paris Agreement and target 13.3 of SDG goal 13 also prioritize building the capacity of those with significant capacity constraints, especially marginalized communities highly exposed to climate change impacts ensuring communities possess the skills, knowledge, and resources to effectively tackle climate change challenges

The local NGOs are often the primary drivers of change, addressing specific issues within their communities and play a vital role in facilitating local communities' voices in climate action. .

Addressing this pressing fact, the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) has devised a plan to build the capacity of NGO professionals through training on different aspects of climate change based on their needs. Furthermore, ICCCAD is building the capacity of government stakeholders, civil society organizations (CSOs), and academicians at the national and regional level on locally led adaptation (LLA) and loss and damage (L&D). This initiative falls under the project 'Capacity Strengthening of Multi-Actors to Limit Climate Change Impacts and Enhance Resilience (CAPRES)' supported by the Embassy of Sweden.

The project has been implemented in Rowmari Upazila of Kurigram district, located in northwest Bangladesh. Initially a Capacity Needs Assessment (CNA) was conducted with NGO representatives in Rowmari who are currently working particularly on Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and Climate Change. This was done through Key Informant Interviews (KII) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD) with elder community representatives and local managers of the NGOs. The primary goal of these interviews was to determine their current climate change adaptation interventions in the area and identify the capacity gaps and needs required to address the impacts of climate change.

The current interventions of the majority of those NGOs consist of regularly organizing a variety of training sessions for different community stakeholders. For instance, the NGOs are providing training to farmers for climate-smart agriculture and livelihoods through the Upazila Agriculture Extension Officer; educating local government representatives and community leaders, such as ward, union, and upazila disaster management committees; developing skills of local youth volunteers on emergency response including first aid and search & rescue missions; and educating women, girls, and young people about social problems including drug addiction, early marriage, and dowries. Additionally, other NGOs are concentrating on developing disaster response strategies, including evacuating the most vulnerable to the shelters and providing emergency dry foods, drinking water, first aid, and essential non-food items such as hygiene kits.

In order to make the community aware and capacitated for adaptation, it is first and foremost to build the capacity of local NGO professionals who work as drivers of change and transmitters of knowledge. Un-

"Addressing this pressing fact, the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) has devised a plan to build the capacity of NGO professionals through training on different aspects of climate change based on their needs"

fortunately, there are insufficient capacity-building programs existing at the grassroots level. Even though NGOs are arranging a number of training sessions for their own employees, it is not so effective. The employees mostly receive training at the beginning of the projects and sometimes once a year in a few organizations. The employees who join midway of the projects usually do not get any training. One underlying factor of their capacity gaps is that most of the employees come from diverse educational backgrounds, where a very tiny number of employees belong to the disciplines relevant to environment, disaster management, and climate change. This hinders their basic knowledge on the fundamentals of climate change adaptation and mitigation.

For instance, through the interviews it was found that only one NGO got training that comprised components of the climate change process, impacts, and response mechanisms. In addition, another major gap found was inadequate training on how NGOs can align climate change adaptation knowledge with existing Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) interventions implemented on the ground. The variety of vulnerability and risk assessments training also excludes components of climate change.

A significant capacity gap amongst the NGO representatives also included, lack of ability in developing a handsome proposal to access climate finance. One of the interviewees shared his recent experience of getting rejected by the government regulated Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) for a project due to the unclear context, poor organizational structure and formatting of the proposal.

In the case of addressing the capacity needs of NGO professionals,the interviewees stated the need for primary to advanced training on the fundamental aspects of climate change including its process, natural and anthropogenic causes, negative impacts, and adaptation strategies on different socio-economic conditions considering the various sectors (such as agriculture, fisheries, aquaculture, livestock, water resources etc). Alongside this, the interviewees urged for an impactful training on proposal development and learning the process of successful submission to access national and international climate funds. It is crucial to integrate and emphasize climate change elements into current practices of vulnerability and risk assessment-as a primary need to promote the collective and synergized efforts of climate change and DRR.

Taking all these gaps and needs into consideration, the CAP-RES project intends to develop modules and provide training to the NGO professionals accordingly, with the aim to enhance the knowledge and skills on usage of adequate tools, equipment, and other resources to lead effective local adaptation efforts. ■

“A significant capacity gap amongst the NGO representatives also included, lack of ability in developing a handsome proposal to access climate finance”

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Natural water-cooling jar "Maiyt" PHOTO: COURTESY

Boldness of Laila Begum in surviving through the climate calamities in Mongla

Resilience and Survival in the Face of Climate Change: The Story of Laili Begum

I have lost everything once in my life during AYLA and I have nothing to lose at the moment except my daughter and this piece of land

Laili Begum, A 45-YEAR-OLD FROM MONGLA PORT CITY, KHULNA

Shimi Chak

On 12th September of 2023, on a sweltering summer day, we embarked on a field visit to the climate rehabilitation area known as 'Guccho Gram' in Mongla. This was part of the Youth Fellowship program, hosted by the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD). Our mission of the visit was to hear the stories of those who have faced disasters in this region. Mongla was chosen for its status as a climate-vulnerable coastal region, having endured numerous natural disasters over the years. Our key informant for this interview was Laili Begum, a resilient climate refugee who offered us a glimpse into her daily life. We sought to uncover the locally led initiatives that have helped the residents survive the unforgiving forces of nature.

As we approached Laili's home, the first thing that caught my eye was an empty pitcher, locally known as 'Maiyt'. Laila Begum uses the Maiyt to capture and store the rainwater and this is their own way of adaptation to the saline water.

Laili Begum and her daughter currently reside in a government provided rehabilitation area, allocated for climate refugees. Her journey to Mongla began 25 years ago, when she got married and made the decision to move there for better employment opportunities. However, their hope got shattered in natural disasters like Sidr and Ayla, and later her husband abandoned her. Unfortunately, the mother and daughter shared the same fate as her daughter's husband also abandoned her after 2 years of marriage. From their point of view, the main reasons husbands abandon women like them is due to poor socio-economic conditions, rising poverty rates and natural disasters exacerbating their status.

Access to fresh water was always a crisis in Mongla. Laili added, "It was all jungle when I came here and my husband earned a decent wage, and we used to buy a jar of water for just 5 BDT, but now, 30-40 liters of water cost nearly 40 BDT, a price beyond our means". Querying about the source of water, she pointed to a pond with greenish water. She collects water from there and, if they have enough fuel, they boil it. Otherwise, they just put alum to clear the water and make it drinkable.

Nearby, a navy camp has dug a pond and BRAC has installed a rainwater harvesting system, offering a more reliable water source during the dry monsoon, and providing each family with two buckets of water. Laili expressed her gratitude, stating, "I am fortunate to have only two family members, so it's enough for us to survive for 2-3 days. Families with more members have to endure greater struggles, as they receive the same amount of water." Laila also sold her hens and ducks saying, "We struggle to provide for ourselves, how can we afford to feed and treat them?"

She works as a helping hand in other people's houses (middle class) and her daughter is unemployed. Even though Mongla is a port city, job opportunities, and income are limitedly accessible which hinders people like Laila to access clean drinking water at a greater price. During the rainy season, Laila's sleep is affected throughout the night, as the roof of the house leaks continuously. During this situation, she spends her night placing buckets and jars on the floors to catch the dripping rainwater.

At last, Laili expressed her hopes for the future, saying, "I don't know what the future holds for us, but I need a sturdy home with a strong roof that can withstand fierce winds and heavy rain, providing us with safety and access to clean drinking water."

Laili Begum's story offers a poignant glimpse into the daily battles faced by climate refugees in the coastal areas of Bangladesh. Her determination to survive in the face of adversity, along with her desire for necessities, serves as a stark reminder of the urgent need to provide adequate financing; capacity-building opportunities; and diversified livelihood opportunities to the ones who are hit hardest by the impacts of climate change. ■

Laili Begum (45), in front of her shabby house PHOTO: COURTESY

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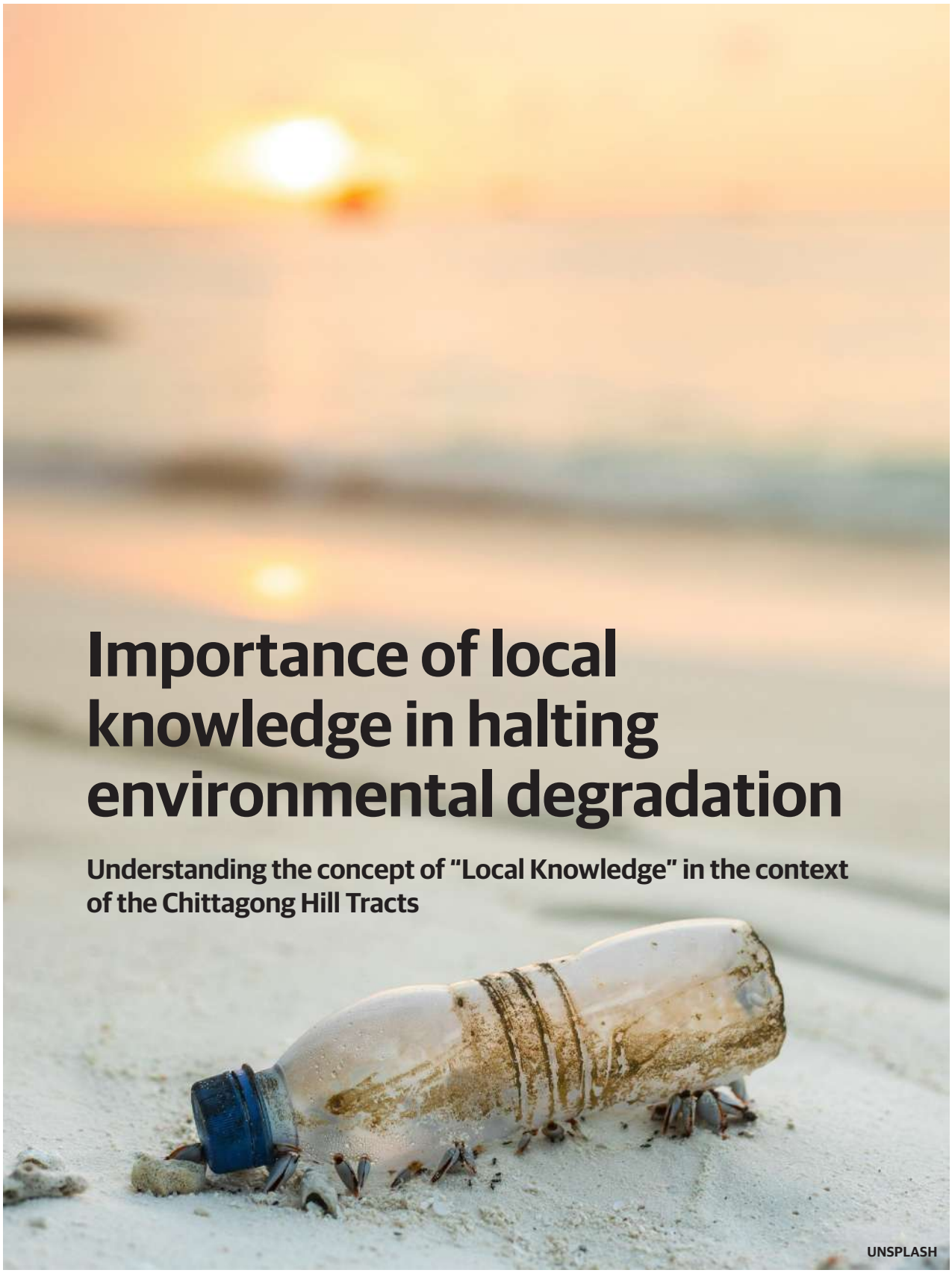
Importance of local knowledge in halting environmental degradation

Understanding the concept of "Local Knowledge" in the context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts



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Alpan Chakma

Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) has a unique landscape and the largest forest cover in Bangladesh. The region is facing rapid environmental changes in recent times, which has escalated in the last two decades. Deforestation in various forms is destroying the forest cover of CHT and the impacts of climate change is affecting the local indigenous community's livelihood in various ways by leading to a shortage of drinking water and natural resources, and temperature rise, etc.

The people of CHT have suffered from the denial of their fundamental rights, political rights and lack of access to equitable development initiatives. Furthermore, the development projects implemented in this region have often been marked by unfairness and a glaring absence of alignment with the local customary laws, the local people's perspectives and their unique requirements. Such policies are creating livelihood problems among the indigenous communities. The lack of integration of local people's understanding and needs in policymaking is resulting in rapid environmental degradation in the region.

There are two reasons behind this gap in the integration of local knowledge into the national policies. First is the lack of awareness and willingness of the state authorities to integrate the local customary laws and practices in the policies. The second reason is the lack of understanding of what "Local knowledge" means in the context of CHT and its role in sustainable environmental management in the region.

While there is a recent endeavour to comprehend the local knowledge of the indigenous communities to address the pressing environmental crisis and adapt to the impacts of climate change in the region, these initiatives have primarily concentrated on the local customary laws and practices. Although customary laws hold significance within the indigenous traditional system, attempting to confine the notion of indigenous knowledge in CHT solely within the boundaries of these laws significantly diminishes our comprehensive grasp of local knowledge in the region. Understandably, when the question of integration comes, customary laws play an important part, but we have to look beyond these laws to have a comprehensive understanding of the concept of "Local Knowledge" in the context of CHT.

While it is important to highlight the customary laws and the local governance system, it is equally important to understand the local cultural belief systems and cultural values. These have been crucial parts of the sustainable livelihood of the indigenous communities, for centuries now. It is important to understand what indigenous people believe and practice in their day-to-day life; and how they perceive the natural elements such as the forests, rivers, the sky, the earth and its relation to their understanding of nature and preservation.

The indigenous communities associate different aspects

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of nature with some holy or evil spirits, with the belief that every natural phenomenon (such as forests, rivers) has an owner, who protects and safeguards the resources and the living beings. Such is the complex belief system of the people of the Chakma community, which is a mixture of local, Buddhist and Hindu values. According to the Chakma cultural belief Jhar o bhudo (The ghost/spirit of the forests) is the owner of the forests, Ma Ganga (Mother Ganga) is the owner of the rivers. The sky is considered as Bap Deva (Father Sky) and the earth as Ma Pittimi (Mother earth).

Jhar o bhudo protects and safeguards the forest resources and the living being dependent on the forests. If he feels exploited, he may bring serious illness and misfortune. Activities such as overhunting of the forest animals and extracting resources excessively are considered dishonourable behaviour towards the spirit. Because of this belief, traditionally Chakma people have managed to use the forest resources in a sustainable manner.

Ma Ganga is the spirit of the rivers, adopted from Hindu mythology and the idea of Ganga. She looks after the rivers and its living creatures. If Ma Ganga is angry and feels violated, she can take people's lives by drowning them in the water, which the Chakma people refer to as "Bhug". This belief helped the Chakma people in sustainable management of the hilly streams.

Ma Laksmi is the goddess of wealth; she brings good yield and fortune to the families. She is the symbol of sustainable use of resources. According to Chakma cultural belief, wasting food is considered a disrespectful gesture towards Ma Lakshmi. If Ma Lakshmi is upset, she brings misfortune to the family.

Likewise, other natural phenomena such as the sky and the earth are respected as they are considered as supreme entities who provide all the necessary elements for cultivation. Chakma people offer freshly harvested crops to the sky, the soil and all the other necessary tools that help them to cultivate their crops before they eat themselves.

All the indigenous communities in CHT have these beliefs of natural entities in different forms. They perform various cultural rituals to worship these entities. These beliefs have a huge influence in indigenous community's livelihood and their understanding of nature. As a result of this spiritual bonding and connections, people find a way to live peacefully and respectfully with nature. So, the question of exploitation does not arise, rather they create a harmonious coexistence scenario between nature and the people.

Despite the potency of these beliefs and practices in sustainable environmental management, very little attention is given to the understanding of "Local Knowledge" in the region. In this time of rapid environmental change in CHT, it is important to rethink these values and deal with the environmental crisis in the region. ■

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