

Briefing

Climate change; Policy and planning

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Policy pointers

In Bangladesh, national policies pave the way for scaling up locally led adaptation (LLA) to climate change. However, government must ensure that there is better coordination between responsible ministries and that local governments have a comprehensive understanding of LLA.

Local communities play a vital role in interventions. National and local government must ensure that they are at the heart of decision making to ensure local ownership, accountability and effectiveness.

Government can learn from and work with NGOs whose interventions have been effective and widely accepted by local communities. These can be replicated and scaled up to achieve national and international targets and commitments.

Based on examples showcased in this briefing, three key action areas require further government support: building local resilience and leadership, building local government capacity, and supporting monitoring, evaluation and learning.

Scaling up locally led adaptation in Bangladesh: three action areas

Although highly climate vulnerable, Bangladesh in South Asia is known as a pioneer of climate change adaptation. Recent national policies have recognised the vital importance of community-based and locally led adaptation (LLA). Where LLA interventions have been used by international and national nongovernmental organisations (NGOs), they have proven to be both effective and widely accepted by local communities. Yet major gaps remain in implementing LLA nationally due to legislative, administrative and conceptual limitations. Meeting Bangladesh's ambitious national targets will require better coordination within government and with NGOs, so that each can benefit from the other. Building on recent examples, this briefing showcases existing interventions that are replicable and scalable and presents three key action areas requiring further government support. The lessons are also relevant to LLA practitioners in Bangladesh and other Least Developed Countries.

With its low-lying topography, high population density and unique geographical setting, Bangladesh is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries in the world.¹ In the last three decades, recurring and intensifying climate-induced disasters — such as cyclones, erratic rainfall, monsoon floods, flash floods, heatwaves, droughts, sea-level rise and salinity intrusion — have exacerbated existing social and economic inequalities. The climate impacts are also hindering the cultural practices, biodiversity and mobility of local communities in remote areas.²

Nonetheless, Bangladesh is one of the few developing countries known globally for its valuable advancements in climate change adaptation. Bangladesh already has a raft of national policies, plans and programmes related to climate change adaptation that aim to enhance local community resilience (Box 1).

Each consists of specific goals, objectives and activities (with corresponding roles and responsibilities) for government and public and private bodies.

However, too often, these national programmes, plans and policies do not echo the realities of local communities or support the needs of local governments, hindering effective progress. To achieve Bangladesh's national targets and fulfil global goals, a consistent collaboration between all parties is essential.

Implementing LLA: key challenges

Over the last two decades, the government's focus on national climate change adaptation policies has gradually shifted from 'community engagement' to 'enhancing community resilience and promoting local leadership' (see Box 1). This shift signifies that the government

recognises the vital importance of community engagement for effective adaptation interventions.

However, despite progress, significant gaps remain in implementing these policies at the grassroots level and in monitoring their

effectiveness. A major flaw that hinders upscaling LLA interventions nationally and subnationally includes the lack of coordination between nodal ministries and implementing bodies responsible for adaptation interventions, leading to poor implementation.

If LLA is to overcome barriers and go to scale in Bangladesh, the government can learn much from existing examples of good practice

There also remains a gap in the comprehensive understanding of the concept of LLA at the local government level. Local governments — those tasked with implementing national climate change policies on the ground — have an insufficient understanding of how those policies should work in practice and of the importance of community engagement. This undermines their

ability to take ownership of or implement policies effectively.³ They also have limited human resources to establish monitoring, evaluation and learning processes to assess the effectiveness of adaptation measures.

In addition, local governments need to create ownership and accountability with local communities. Currently, there is a marked lack of effective inclusion in adaptation planning and decision-making processes.⁴ This increases the risk of maladaptive and unsustainable interventions.⁵ Other key issues relating to community inclusion and ownership include the lack of capacity building, alternative livelihood opportunities, smooth and transparent financing, or context-specific interventions.

Scaling up LLA: three key action areas

If LLA is to overcome barriers and go to scale in Bangladesh, the government can learn much from existing examples of good practice. Many interventions by international and national NGOs are proving to be both effective and widely accepted by the local communities involved.

In particular, three action areas stand out for further government support: building local leadership and resilience, building local government capacity, and supporting effective monitoring, evaluation and learning. In the following sections, these action areas are outlined in more detail, using examples from practice taken from four case studies developed for this briefing.

In each case, the implementers have worked as 'enablers' so that local communities can carry out adaptation activities more effectively. All three action areas are interrelated and in combination will contribute to the overall effectiveness of intervention measures, helping to build the capacity of both local communities and local government.

Build local leadership and resilience

The aim of LLA is to build the capacities of local communities to take ownership of their own solutions and reduce interdependency. Local communities need to be proactively involved in LLA measures, and their knowledge, networks and capabilities sufficiently recognised and used.

However, interventions should not be steered by external and Western experts undermining local efficiency.⁶ Local communities should be given the freedom to decide their own adaptation futures based on their own complex and multidimensional realities, creating scope for

Box 1. National adaptation policies, plans and programmes in Bangladesh

- **National Adaptation Programme of Action (2005, updated 2009):** Bangladesh's first programme for climate change adaptation emphasises the importance of local involvement, contingency planning, capacity building and ecosystem-based adaptation.
- **Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2009):** Recognises the importance of community involvement in adaptation and emphasises local community participation in identifying adaptation needs.
- **Bangladesh Climate Change Gender Action Plan (2013):** Highlights involving those usually 'left behind' — women, children, youth and people with disabilities — in curating equitable adaptation solutions by promoting community involvement, vulnerability assessments, capacity building and gender-responsive adaptation measures.
- **Climate Fiscal Framework (2014, updated 2020):** Promotes sustainable and equitable adaptation solutions that benefit all stakeholders by facilitating decentralised decision making and encouraging the use of local knowledge and resources. This involves enabling local governments and organisations to plan and deliver climate-resilient infrastructure and services, such as water-management systems and disaster risk reduction.
- **National Adaptation Plan 2023–2050 (2022):** Acknowledges that LLA will be essential in mobilising local communities to catalyse effective, equitable and transparent adaptation solutions based on local priorities.
- **Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (2021):** Outlines LLA investments of US\$3.89 billion and plans to mobilise an additional US\$1 billion by 2030. Also aims to set up Mujib LLA hubs in all vulnerable areas.

local governments and other associated stakeholders to support them. This requires building local leadership and resilience. Three good examples from practice come from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Bangladesh (Box 2), the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) (Box 3), and Practical Action (Box 4).

There are also tools that can help to build local resilience. One example is Practical Action's Flood Resilience Measurement Tool for Communities (FRMC). Since 2013, Practical Action has used the FRMC framework to facilitate comprehensive real-time assessments of climate risks and to guide community actions that enhance resilience by identifying actions needed to protect their properties, livestock and families both pre- and post-flood disasters.

Climate change and gender-related policies must also emphasise the importance of co-creating tools to benefit vulnerable communities, which in turn can enhance their participation in local leadership (see Box 4).

Build local government capacity

For LLA to be scaled up effectively, it is crucial to build the capacity of local governments so they understand the importance of including local communities in decision-making processes and can assess the resources and support required from government to address local priorities. This will help to improve local-level planning and improve monitoring, evaluation and learning, leading to better governance.

The example in Box 5 demonstrates how working with NGOs can improve the capacity of local governments and local communities, helping to mainstream LLA into local planning processes. Local governments can then share lessons learnt with the relevant climate change ministries to increase future LLA uptake.

Support monitoring, evaluation and learning

Establishing monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL) is vital to ensure ownership, transparency, and accountability. For example, by using accessible feedback mechanisms, local communities can share their experiences of adaptation interventions with local government. Officials can then regularly update the responsible ministries on progress and what further support is required. This helps to build trust between communities and local governments and improves the effectiveness of adaptation measures, such as the local development and resilience plans discussed in Boxes 2 and 5.

Box 2. UNDP Bangladesh's Climate Change Resilient Project

In 2018–2021, UNDP Bangladesh's Climate Change Resilient Project (CCRP) focused on developing community-led water-related adaptation solutions. It was designed based on the capacities and leadership qualities of local Indigenous communities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The project formed Climate Resilience Committees (CRCs), ensuring that almost 50% of committee members were women. The CRCs helped to incorporate local and traditional knowledge and facilitated the communities' involvement in designing, planning, implementing, coordinating and monitoring interventions. They also managed and disbursed funds for adaptation interventions and developed a Local Resilience Plan (LRP).

Box 3. CCDB's Community Climate Resilience Centre

In 2014, the Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) created the Community Climate Resilience Centre, an innovative cyclone shelter in southwest Bangladesh. Every two years, community members elect an executive committee (with at least 30% women and 10% youth). The CCRC's funding mechanism is operationalised by local small businesses. Funds are spent on activities prioritised by the committee.

Local government officials also use the centre to provide regular services to local communities, including weather-related information and accessible technological solutions for adaptive agriculture. The centre also provides healthcare and supports diversifying incomes (60 women entrepreneurs commercially produce organic fertiliser).

Box 4. Enhancing women's leadership

As part of the Zurich Flood Resilience Project, Practical Action has strengthened local women's leadership by establishing them as local resilience agents (LRAs). LRAs are responsible for transmitting early warnings and mobilising their communities during floods. These women leaders have increased their visibility in their communities through regular community meetings. The project has also motivated more women to stand in local government elections and contribute to their communities' wellbeing.

Box 5. Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LoGIC)

From 2016 to 2023, UNDP Bangladesh's LoGIC initiative has worked in 72 unions (the smallest administrative unit) across seven districts in Bangladesh. LoGIC aims to strengthen the capacity of local governments, households (especially women) and other relevant stakeholders to develop local development plans that integrate climate change adaptation and disaster resilience measures.

With guidance from the project, vulnerable communities have worked together with local government to develop participatory community risk assessments, hazard maps and risk atlases. This has then informed local Risk Reduction Action Plans (RRAPs). The plans are integrated into local development planning processes and are regularly screened against current and emerging environmental, climate-related and disaster risk priorities to regularly improve the climate-inclusive Local Development Plans.

Simultaneously, local government can help local communities to enhance their leadership skills, which will lead to the co-creation of knowledge and adaptation efforts. This will not only reduce the dependency of local communities and institutions on external donor funding but help to design capacity-building programmes to enhance autonomy and access to finance, and nurture their existing networks.

Final thoughts

These examples show how Bangladesh's national adaptation programmes, policies and plans can support good governance and transform the capacity of both local communities and local governments. Each case suggests ways forward and offers lessons to widen implementation, while demonstrating that there is no one-size-fits-all pathway. But they also show how a combined effort at all levels can ensure effective implementation.

To scale up these types of interventions effectively, local government and national ministries can further collaborate to assess how national policies resonate with building local

leadership. This will reduce interdependency and make interventions more sustainable. In addition, government and NGOs can continue to learn and work together, for example through informal peer-to-peer learning and networking events, roundtable dialogues, and quarterly meetings and updates, and by agreeing shared responsibilities. In this way, government can undertake similar measures to achieve national adaptation targets and strengthen policy implementation at scale.

Afsara Binte Mirza, Savio Rousseau Rozario and Chowdhury Abrar Zahin

Afsara Binte Mirza is a research officer at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD). Savio Rousseau Rozario is a programme coordinator for the Locally-led Adaptation Programme at ICCCAD. Chowdhury Abrar Zahin is a research intern at ICCCAD.

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Contact

Helen O'Connor
helen.oconnor@iied.org

Third Floor, 235 High Holborn
London, WC1V 7DN
United Kingdom

Tel: +44 (0)20 3463 7399
www.iied.org

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Notes

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