

BANGLADESH



TALTOLI,
BARGUNA,
BARISHAL

CLIMATE JUSTICE
FEMINIST
PARTICIPATORY
ACTION RESEARCH
2017-18

COUNTRY PROFILE

Bangladesh is the poster child at various international climate change deliberations. One of the most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts, Bangladesh has been relentlessly witnessing cyclones, floods, landslides and saline water intrusions in recent times. These, in turn, pose a tremendous threat to the land and livelihoods of thousands of poor people who are dependent on the forests, rivers and oceans.

Over the last 45 years since independence, Bangladesh has increased its per capita income by 160 percent and cut poverty by more than 50%. It has significantly reduced its maternal mortality figures and increased literacy in women. However, patriarchal practices continue to keep gender equality a distant dream in the country. Lack of property rights, barriers to women's participation in governance and decision making processes, high levels of violence against women, unfair wages and poor working conditions are some of the indicators of persisting gender inequality in Bangladesh.

The Ministry of Environment and Forests (MoEF) is the department primarily responsible for dealing with climate change in Bangladesh. Some of its crucial publications are The National Adaptation Programme of Action

Organising Rakhine indigenous women for participation in national and local climate justice processes

This CJFPAR was conducted by Maleya Foundation, an organisation working for the rights of indigenous peoples in Bangladesh along with Rakhine Social Development Organisation (RSDO). Maleya conducted the CJFPAR with women from 13 villages in the coastal area of Taltoli, Barguna and Barishal. The CJFPAR worked with the Rakhine indigenous community. The community is facing risks from natural disasters and is being alienated from their land and forests by land grabbers and creation of protected forests, etc. It focused on building capacities of the Rakhine women to understand climate change, land and forest rights and to participate in public hearings, governance and decision-making processes, etc.

(NAPA) and The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP). In 2005, NAPA identified 15 important adaptation programmes and activities. In 2009, it was revised to include 45 key adaptation measures under six themes. However, climate change processes and mechanisms at local- and national-level continue to fail to adopt a gender-friendly strategy. Additionally, the recognition of indigenous peoples' rights is also completely absent from the legal policy and institutional framework in Bangladesh.



CLIMATE ISSUES IN TALTOLI

Bangladesh has around 54 indigenous communities — with women accounting for nearly half of this population — spread across the country. These indigenous communities face discriminations and are marginalised after being discriminated within the country through its social arrangements and policy formulations.

The indigenous communities' livelihoods are severely affected in the FPAR area. The community, dependent on traditional subsistence agriculture and forest products for food, is witnessing a drastic reduction in production and loss of natural sources of food. Additionally, women are absent in the process of decision making while designing coping mechanisms and development initiatives by the government.

Loss of land and livelihood: The community is losing land to increasing salinity and land grabbing for commercial purposes. The land that the community used for subsistence agriculture is now scarce. In addition, the creation of the Tengragiri Eco Park took

away forest rights from the community. This in turn has forced communities to take up new forms of insecure livelihoods like daily wage labour, selling handmade products, rearing farm animals and setting up small shops. These new activities hardly generate income that covers costs of living for the community.



Increasing and unpredictable natural disasters:

Cyclones and floods have been part of the landscape in Rakhine areas and the community was adept at living with disasters. Cyclones came twice a year and they would be prepared to protect themselves and their properties. After the cyclone, they would reconstruct



WOMEN-LED ACTION

By organising themselves, attending trainings and having regular conversations, the women identified that their participation in local governance processes is important for them to be able to take actions that will help them cope with climate change.

Collectivisation: The women have formed groups in 13 villages. These women's groups attended capacity building programmes by Malaya foundation. They met regularly to discuss their issues and contribute to the data collected through FPAR.

Participation and advocacy: Convinced that participation is the key to address their situation, the women started attending community meetings and government programmes. In these spaces, they questioned the absence of their voice and demanded that they be included in the discussions

Generating awareness and demanding rights: As the women became aware of their rights, they demanded and encouraged each other to access support programmes by the government and NGOs.



everything collectively. However, these days there are cyclones almost every month that destroy their homes, property and crops. There is little time to prepare or recover between two cyclones.

Migration: In the face of recurring disasters, many Rakhine people are migrating to Myanmar or the cities and towns in Bangladesh.

Health: The recurring floods and cyclones have been polluting the sources of drinking water leading to health issues. Stomach ailments, respiratory diseases and fatigue from overwork has become common in the community. The increasing salinity of the seawater is causing new skin diseases in the workers who depend on fishing and shrimp farming. Majority of these workers in the shrimp farms are women.



DEMANDS AND FUTURE ACTION

- The national and international bodies concerned with climate justice, women's rights, indigenous peoples' rights, and other human rights mechanisms should **highlight the struggles and conditions of coastal indigenous communities in Bangladesh** in order to influence the Bangladesh government to reformulate relevant policies in an inclusive and non-discriminatory manner.
- **In the national policies, 'non-discrimination' should be the foremost principle** and its implementation on the ground should be constantly monitored needs to be monitored.
- National policies related to climate change

should acknowledge and address the varied impacts of climate change on coastal Rakhine communities, especially on women. **Specific provisions to gender responsive and culturally sensitive measures** should be taken.

- **Free, Prior and Informed Consent** and meaningful participation of the communities must be ensured in the planning, implementation and evaluation stages of all Acts and policies that can potentially affect Rakhine communities.
- GOs and NGOs should come up with **sustainable livelihood alternatives and opportunities** for coastal Rakhine communities. Livelihood programmes should be developed **in consultation with the women of the community** and incorporate their needs and capacities.



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