



Mitigating NELD Impacts from Climate Change in At-Risk Communities in Bangladesh

Policy target: UNFCCC - LCIPP Facilitative Working Group

Overview

Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts e.g. rising sea levels, affecting local communities. The consequences of these impacts extend beyond economic losses, as they disrupt cultural heritage, worsen erosive coping mechanisms, and lead to disproportionate physical and mental health impacts on women and girls, especially those from low-socioeconomic backgrounds (Van Schie et al. 2024) - contributing to Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD). Despite the severity of these impacts, existing policies often overlook NELD, focusing primarily on physical and economic damage. The following policy recommendations aim to address the gap by prioritising community-driven resilience, helping vulnerable populations adapt to and recover from NELD impacts.

Focus: Engaging those at the forefront of climate change, such as women, youth, indigenous peoples, local communities, and persons with disabilities.

Definitions

Non-Economic Loss and Damages (NELD):

Non-economic loss and damage (NELD) is defined as “impacts on aspects of life that are not typically traded in markets” (UNFCCC, 2013). The lowercase form of the term refers to the actual impacts of such loss and damage on affected communities. In contrast, the capitalised form, Loss and Damage (L&D) refers to the broader discourse surrounding key actors of financial responsibility when tackling NELD impacts.

Other terms include ‘feedback loops’ and their appropriate implementation in policy, alongside the term ‘community resilience’, both outlined in Choudhury et al. 2023. These terms are key to understanding impacts and evaluation when discussing how best to strengthen local knowledge and autonomous response within communities.

Policy Recommendations



1) Establish Structural Procedures for Community Feedback

Develop structural procedures, policies, and guidelines to ensure continuous community feedback in project planning. Using the Local Communities and Indigenous Peoples Platform (LCIPP) as a facilitator, this approach ensures NELD-related responses are guided by local insights and needs. To support this process, implement adaptable qualitative comparison frameworks that foster community-based consensus, with feedback loops that allow these frameworks to adapt to each unique environmental context and community needs.

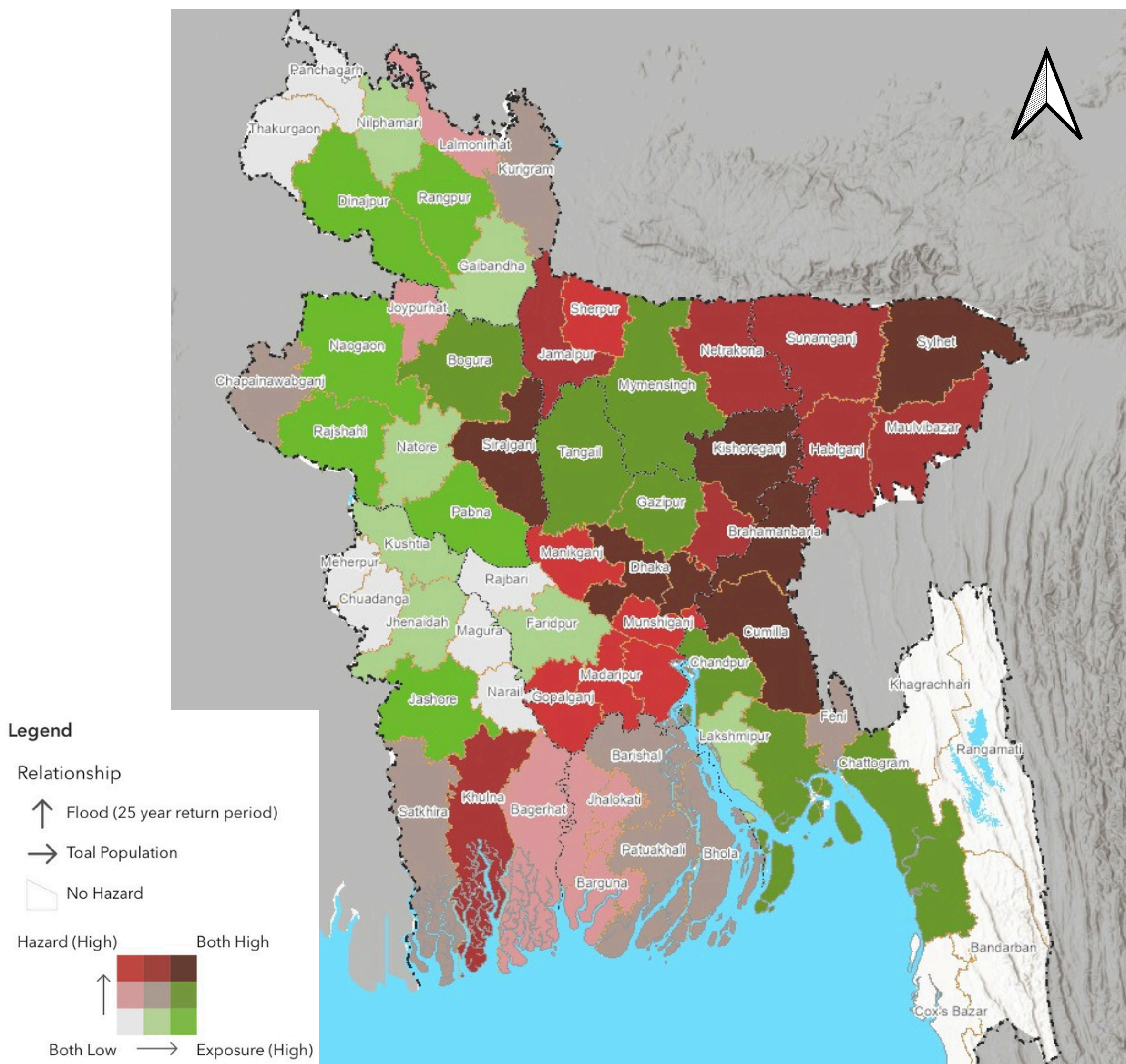
2) Strengthen Community Resilience to Support Autonomous Response

Enhance long-term social resilience by allocating funding from international climate finance mechanisms to support targeted capacity-building programs. Prioritise initiatives that promote adaptive strategies, such as improving access to bathing facilities to mitigate the health impacts of salinisation in remote, low-income communities in Bangladesh. Strengthen public service infrastructure and facilitate community-led adaptation efforts, leveraging integrated local knowledge and evidence-based practices to foster community resilience, enabling communities to transition from reactive coping mechanisms to proactive adaptation.

3) Expand LCIPP's FWG Outreach Capabilities

Broaden the outreach efforts of LCIPP's Facilitative Working Group (FWG), both online and offline. Remove barriers faced by communities lacking internet access, particularly in rural and low-income areas. Ensure online information and resources are regularly updated and that online outreach tools are easily accessible for all relevant contributors.

Multi Hazard Risk and Vulnerability Assessment of Population against Flood Risk (25 Year Return Period)



Key Findings

An extensive literature review on NELD impacts in Bangladesh reveals significant knowledge gaps in effectively addressing these challenges, along with concerns of erosive coping mechanisms if disaster resilience is poorly coordinated, leaving communities in the Majority World to deal with the harshest impacts of a climate crisis predominately driven by emissions in the Global North (Van Schie, 2024).

Key challenges faced by the UNFCCC and affected states in addressing NELD include difficulty in analysing impacts and efficacy of resilience efforts. Commonly used comparison frameworks may not effectively capture the nuances of how NELD impacts are experienced by the affected community, especially considering that NELD refers to “impacts on aspects of life that are not typically traded in markets” (UNFCCC, 2013). Furthermore, pre-defined categories of NELD may not always fully capture a community’s perceptions of what matters most to them.

With this in mind, our recommendations focus on empowering individual communities to provide feedback on their specific needs, which can then be integrated into wider NELD mitigation strategies, as well as building local resilience through targeted funding. In Bangladesh, there may be access barriers to engagement platforms such as the LCIPP’s FWG, as a proportion of communities lack access to spaces that engage with this platform. We propose that in the absence of access to the internet, offline engagement initiatives such as mobile units and in-person workshops should be scaled up to ensure local knowledge and direct feedback are heard.



38% of Bangladeshi citizens have regular access to the internet:



Source: World Bank, 2023 - ‘Share of the Population using the Internet - International Telecommunication Union

Discussion

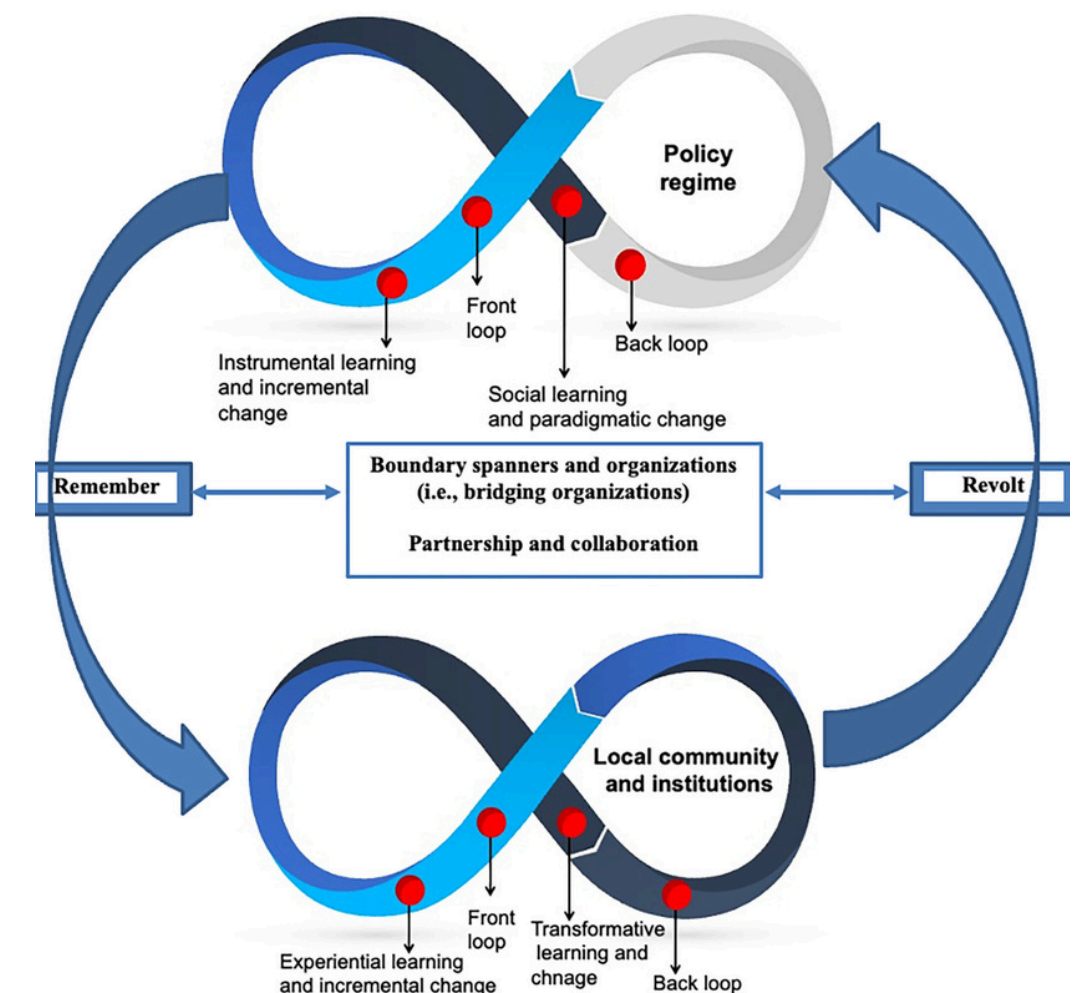
The impacts of climate change extend beyond economic losses, significantly disrupting the social, cultural, and emotional fabric of vulnerable communities. These NELD impacts - including loss of cultural heritage, mental and physical health challenges, displacement, and erosion of community identity - are often overlooked in climate policy frameworks. In Bangladesh, where rising sea levels and climate-induced disasters exacerbate socio-economic vulnerabilities, these impacts are especially profound.

Despite their significance, current policy approaches frequently prioritise tangible, economic losses over the less quantifiable but equally devastating effects of NELD. The top-down nature of many interventions fails to adequately incorporate the perspectives and priorities of affected communities. For instance, traditional frameworks may impose predefined categories of loss that do not reflect the values or lived experiences of those directly impacted. Addressing these gaps requires a paradigm shift toward inclusive, community-driven policymaking that foregrounds local knowledge and resilience.

This brief builds on existing UNFCCC principles, emphasising the inclusion of marginalised groups - such as women, youth, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities - in the design and implementation of policies addressing NELD. It proposes strategies to enhance feedback mechanisms, empower community resilience, and expand outreach capacity of platforms like the LCIPP. By amplifying community voices and addressing systemic barriers, we can build a more equitable and effective response to the growing challenges of NELD impacts.

1) Establish Structural Procedures for Community Feedback

Developing structural procedures that allow frameworks for community feedback to be implemented in institutional approaches to NELD will enable greater tailored support for communities at high risk of NELD impacts. The current UNFCCC framework, which identifies core topics frequently impacted by NELD, may overlook aspects of loss and damage that are key to understanding how NELD affects local communities - especially those at the lower end of the socio-economic spectrum, who are often at highest risk of immobility during crisis (Van Schie, 2024). Implementing feedback loops for community resilience, as outlined in Choudhury et al. 2023, allow for continuous improvement in resilience capacity and ensure more effective resource allocation.



Adaptive Cycle Model Feedback Loop (Choudhury et al. 2023)

2) Strengthen Community Resilience to Support Autonomous Response

Strengthening community resilience enhances local capacity, enabling communities to better absorb shocks, adapt to changes, and transform traditional practices in a respectful and integrative manner for long-term sustainability. Through experiential and transformative learning, communities can develop agency over their response and adopt practices such as relocating homes, improving structural designs, and integrating Indigenous and local knowledge (ILK). By combining traditional knowledge with new coping strategies, communities develop hybrid approaches that are both context-sensitive and innovative, minimising dependency on external aid. Autonomous response reduces vulnerabilities by tackling local risks directly, eliminating issues that arise from top-down policy approaches.

3) Expand LCIPP's FWG Outreach Capabilities

The current reliance on online platforms disproportionately excludes rural and low-income communities, many of which lack reliable internet access or digital literacy. To ensure inclusivity and representation of those most affected by climate change and NELD impacts, it is crucial to expand outreach efforts both offline and online. Offline engagement initiatives should include mobile units and in-person workshops, leveraging local knowledge to gather insights and direct feedback. For online accessibility, it is essential to simplify and modernise LCIPP's digital platforms, ensuring they are user-friendly and available in multiple languages. By enhancing these outreach efforts, at-risk communities will have better opportunities to voice their needs and actively participate in decision-making processes for long-term resilience.

Conclusion

Addressing the multifaceted impacts of NELD requires more than incremental policy adjustments; it demands a paradigm shift toward inclusive and community-centred approaches. Communities in Bangladesh and other vulnerable regions are already demonstrating resilience through autonomous responses, yet they cannot be expected to bear the brunt of climate change alone. By integrating structural feedback mechanisms, strengthening local resilience, and expanding the LCIPP's outreach capabilities, we can create policies that truly reflect the needs and priorities of those on the frontlines. These actions are essential - not only for mitigating the impacts of NELD, but to foster equity and sustainability in global climate governance and enabling communities to adapt and build resilience to an ever-changing world.

Recommended Reading

Van Schie, D., Ranon, R.J.K, Mirza, A. B., & Anderson, S. (2022). Local responses to climate-related non-economic losses and damages: A case study in Burigolani and Gabura Union, Southwest Bangladesh. IIED.

Van Schie, D., Jackson, G., Ranon, R.J.K. et al. Addressing non-economic loss and damage: learning from autonomous responses in Bangladesh. *Climatic Change* 177, 124 (2024).

Van Schie, D., Jackson, G., Ranon, R.J.K., Mirza, A. B., Hossain, M. F., Bakhtaoui, I., Anderson, A. (2024) *Addressing NELD; learning from autonomous responses in Bangladesh*

Shining the Light on NELD: Challenges, Risks and Lessons Learned (2016) Non-economic Loss and Damage: Addressing the Forgotten Side of Climate Change Impacts (German Development Institute)

Mahed Choudhury, Haorui Wu, A. K. M. Shahidullah, 2023, Improving the feedback loop between community- and policy-level learning: Building resilience of coastal communities in Bangladesh