

## Community based Organizations (CBOs) in the Climate Change Governance in Bangladesh: Policy initiatives and challenges

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**Abstract:** Bangladesh is one of the most climate change vulnerable countries in the world. Effective governance of climate change issues is crucial for the recently graduated lower-middle income country for her development juncture. Community based Organizations (CBOs) is assumed as an important tool for effective climate change governance to promote participation from communities, and accelerate innovative solution from the root. Climate change governance is understood as a process of multitier governance where the role of the CBOs is important along with other stake holders. This paper seeks the role of CBOs in climate change governance in Bangladesh both from policy and institutions level. It is noticed that CBOs in Bangladesh get less importance in mainstream policy framework at local, regional, and national level. It is also observed that most Community Organizations working on climate vulnerabilities and adaptation are either NGO facilitated or NGO funded organizations. In fact, government expects role of the CBOs only as secondary agencies, and high priority is given to the NGOs. The government financing plan is centered on the NGOs by disbursing climate funds through the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF). Corruption is one of the challenges of these funding because of prevailing administrative and political culture. Because of the structure of the nation's climate governance, CBOs seen little prospect to effectively contribute in climate change governance.

**Keywords:** Climate Change Governance, Community based Organizations (CBOs), NGOs, Corruption and Governance challenges

### Introduction

Often referred to as *ground zero* for climate change, (Inman, 2009) Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to the adverse effects of climate change. Geographical characteristics makes the country prone to extreme weather risks such as cyclones, floods, and storm surges. Identified as *Poster Child of Vulnerability*, the country encounters sea level rise, biodiversity degradation, saltwater intrusion, desertification, social exclusion, unstable political conditions, and weak governance systems together. (Rahman, 2018) The country recently graduated as lower middle-income country, and this juncture of development will be significantly influenced by the way the country able to fight climate change in future. Community based Organizations (CBOs) are regarded as important component of climate governance on the lowest tier. For an effective managerial strategy for climate adaptation, participation of CBOs can ensure accountability and transparency mechanism, and it can also act as a response instrument for climate causes. In case of Bangladesh, CBOs can play important role to engage people, and tailor innovative adaptation

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formula from the bottom to effectively cope with adverse climate situation. Therefore, CBOs involvement in climate governance is important in perspective of Bangladesh. The country has signed most of the international protocols linked to climate governance, and undertaken various policies concentrating on effective climate governance. For the nation of sixteen million, effective climate governance strategy is crucial for her development goals, and for the survival of her own people. Therefore, it is important to analyze the advancement and loopholes of the climate governance of the country to assess the magnitude of the problems, and evaluate the role of the CBOs in this regard. This paper tries to diagnosis the policy and actions taken by the country to face the projected climate change challenges engaging CBOs from root level, and tries to bring those issues in broader governance framework. In doing so, the study follows content analysis as a methodical approach, and different books, articles, research papers, paper clippings, research seminar, document papers, concept notes and related websites concerning the issues are reviewed for the purpose.

### **Conceptual Discussion: Climate change Governance and CBOs role**

Increased Public and political interest in climate change have been noticed in recent years. (Fröhlich & Knieling, 2013, p. 10). Environment degradation has become a global concern for the sustainability of human civilization, and the world is looking for a sustainable solution for future generation. Nevertheless, a paradigm shift has been noticed in the way of governing procedure from centralized government system to more participatory governance arrangement. In this perspective, climate change governance is considered as the management of climate issues within a participatory mechanism where both global and local actors' role are guaranteed. It is described as a *wide variety of coordinating methods contributing to the adaptation and mitigation of climate change* (Knieling & Filho, 2013, p. 1). The process works in a complex polycentric structure that spreads from the global to national and sub-national levels. (Gregorioa & others, 2019) The process includes a wide range of steering mechanisms ranging from informal cooperation between different institutions and actors to hierarchical forms of regulation. (Knieling & Filho, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, climate governance suggests comprising more actors from global and local level, and involving people from community level. Environmental governance is being characterized by the transition from government to governance where government regulatory structure is not the solo actor. (de Loë & Others, 2009). In this fraework, it is suggested to emphasize to non-state actors due to the limited capacity of government agencies (de Loë & Others, 2009). It is true for climate governance as well. Due to the complexity of climate variables and its global characteristics, it is assumed that more actors need to be involved for effective management of climate institutions. Effective climate change governance depends on collaboration between governments and other non-governmental organizations. For the reason, the necessity of engaging different sectors of society in the climate change debate has become evident in recent time. (Knieling & Filho, 2013, p. 2) Multitier governance is thought to be effective formula to fight against the climate vulnerabilities. A key characteristic of climate change is its multiplicity of different

perspectives and interests. (Fröhlich & Knieling, 2013, p. 11). Multi-level governance is steered not only by public sector, but also by private and other level, and covers multiple geographic scale, levels and sectors. (Keskitalo, 2010, p. 4). Multitier governance of climate change combines different actors to effective participation in adaptation procedure. The process focuses on local institution and community participation. It includes decentralized adaptive governance for local initiatives to foster networks to enhance collective actions. (Underdal, 2010)

In Fighting climate change Collaborative institutional arrangements are important that incorporate local governments, community organizations and the private sector. (Diaz & Hurlbert, 2013, p. 176). Community based organizations (CBOs) are the organized efforts from community with the goal to preserve common interests. Chechetto-Salles and Geyer described CBOs as a non-profit organizations that provides social services at the local level, and heavily depended on voluntary contributions for labor, material and financial support. (Chechetto-Salles & Geyer, 2006) Community based organizations (CBOs) can play an effective role in this regard to recognize the problem from local level by their firsthand experience, and can adapt to new situation. CBOs have good track records in anti-corruption activities (Sakib, 2020) worldwide and considered as an important part for effective governance. Community based adaptation is one of the methods that is applied for effective governance technique. There are some multiple benefits of communitybased approaches: *increase community acceptance and implementation of planning objectives; add to the Climate Adaptive Planning knowledge base by including local knowledge; provide experience for community residents and groups with long-range planning, and; increase the democratic legitimacy of the planning objectives.* (Rosenthal & Brechwald, pp. 221-222) However, public involvement encounters some barriers both in individual and social level. Bulkeley & Newell identified lack of action by governments, business and industry; “free rider effect”; pressure of social norms and expectations; lack of enabling initiatives as social barriers to involve community in climate change process. (Bulkeley & Newell, 2010, p. 72) In a study of New York City, it is suggested that community-based adaptation planning process may help address the social justice dimension of the impacts of extreme events and climate change while increasing the effectiveness of adaptive programs and policies. (Rosenthal & Brechwald, p. 205) In a study of 720 farming households in six districts of Nepal shows that CBOs play important role in reducing the negative impacts of climate change by enhancing agricultural adaptation and it was found that 62 percent households were connected to CBOs. (Khanal, Wilson, Hoang, & Lee, 2019) In a study of Rwanda also confirms that CBOs have a positive role to increase farmers awareness and enhance capacity regarding to climate change and crops productivity. (Aboniyo & Mourad, 2017) Therefore, evidences around the globe shows positive impact of CBOs engagement in climate change governance, and this can be recognized as a research gap in regard of Bangladesh where limited academic researches has been executed on the role of CBOs to fight climate change from policy, implementation challenges and governance perspectives.

### **CBOs in the policy initiatives of Climate governance in Bangladesh**

Bangladesh is one of the environment vulnerable countries in the world. The country has a good advancement in regulating laws and intuitional arrangement over the years for environmental perspectives. The Fifteen amendment of the constitution includes a major step in this regard where environment protection become a state responsibility: *“The State shall endeavor to protect and improve the environment and to preserve and safeguard the natural resources, bio-diversity, wetlands, forests and wild life for the present and future citizens.”* (constitution of Bangladesh, 2011) Climate change challenges, however, added to environmental governance discourse as a recent phenomenon for the intensity of the issues. For that reason, the issue was not included in various important policies adopted before the millennium, and CBOs also did not get attention for the reason. The national policy of Environment, 1992 did not include climate change in the policy obviously. The new updated national environment policy of 2018, however, included Climate change as a major part of focus of the policy. It highlights the future policy guidelines to follow in environment management of the country. According to the umbrella policy, all development planning at adaptation and implementation level should include climate change adaptation and mitigation to cope with the adverse consequences of climate change. (Bangladesh, 2018) The policy also emphasis on the roles of government and non-government organizations to establish Climate Change Knowledge Network to exchange communications and experiences for effective steps for fighting climate change, however, any role of CBOs is not mentioned in the policy. (Bangladesh, 2018) It can be argued that the umbrella national policy can be major instrument to enforce governance guideline in the coming days for climate change governance and other related environmental issues, however, multitier adaptation strategy is completely absent in this important document. Nevertheless, environments issues seen to get less importance in policy and implementation process in the country due to more focusing on development endeavor, and it is also evident that the national policy gain little focus in government apparatus and mainstreaming of the national policy was not observed at all.

It is witnessed that Bangladesh is responsive to most of climate related issues at policy level. The country is the signatory of most international climate change protocols and has undertaken some important policy steps and initiatives to cope with projected adverse situation due to climate change. ‘National Action Plan on Adaptation’ (NAPA) of 2005 and the ‘Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan’ (BCCSAP) of 2009 have been adopted by the government. ‘National Action Plan on Adaptation’ (NAPA) of 2005 was first of its kind to recognize climate change in development strive of the nation and it also marks CBOs in climate Change issues. It suggested 15 adaptation measures to address adverse effects of climate change of which community participation in coastal afforestation, and information access to community for emergency preparedness measures for climatic disasters are included (Bangladesh, 2005, p. xvi). For coastal afforestation, the plan propose Community based organizations as Secondary implementing agencies



along with NGOs (Bangladesh, 2005, p. 27) For Capacity building for integrating Climate Change in planning, designing of infrastructure, conflict management and land-water zoning for water management institutions, It also suggest CBOs as Secondary implementing agencies. (Bangladesh, 2005, p. 30). Therefore, the action plan has included the CBOs participation in climate governance procedures, however, those got limited attention from top body of policy design while implementation of government projects. Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) can be described as a government success and it is a timely response to the climate change issues following the Bali Road Map and other international climate commitment of government. It is designed as an integral part of implementing other policies, plan and strategies; and it recognizes the vision, strategy and action plan of the government facing the climate change in upcoming days. It has six pillars that prioritize the need and action plans for the government. The Government recognized the role of community organizations in fighting climate vulnerabilities by involving communities in planning, construction, and management of programs in this plan. BCCSAP emphasis on community based program in comprehensive disaster management programs and gave high priority to support people and community at local level to strengthen their resilience and adaptation to climate change. (Bangladesh, 2009, p. 18). In short, it can be said that Bangladesh government has taken an integrated governance response policy involving government agencies, civil societies, donor agencies, NGOs and CBOs and the policy is linked with global climate governance. However, the policy does not elaborately categorize the specific role of each non-state actors, and also the CBOs role is not clearly illustrated. The government has created two funds to face the climate related consequences: Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) of \$200 million and the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF) of \$114 million. The BCCRF entitled the Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) as responsible institution for Community Climate Change Project (CCCP) allocated \$13 million of its climate-resilience funding to NGOs for community-driven adaptation to climate change. (World Bank, 2017) Therefore, it is apparent that CCCP projects is designed on NGO centric model to engage community to climate change projects that is obviously top down structured. Nevertheless, it can be argued that the prospect of government integrated policies to engage CBOs from the bottom is thin. Though the country has successfully installed different measures and institutions to combat climate change, a growing concern of climate vulnerabilities, environmental degradation, corruption, exclusion from local level and management issues can be identified in ongoing political arena.

### **CBOs in Climate change Governance in Bangladesh**

Community based Organizations (CBOs) are regarded as important element of climate governance on the lowest tier and sought to be active in climate related matters to achieve resilience. Union Disaster Management Committee (UDMC) is thought to be one of effective body to response to climate risks. It is one of the public disaster management observing bodies where role of CBO is supposed to be apparent but reality tells otherwise.

It supposed to be 36 members (maximum) committee with a full dominance of Union Parishad (UP) chairman who is given the authority to nominate most of the members. It is highly centralized body dominated by the chairman and other UP members. Though, representatives of the Peasant and Fishermen Society are proposed in the committee, the option is open to nominate member in case of unavailability of member from such community. In a highly client patronage system in rural Bangladesh, it is apparent that this structure will give little space to operate from a community initiative. Moreover, the system of UDMC does not work effectively according to the implementation policies. In a research report, it is found that the UDMC of some studied areas have no activities for Disaster Management during normal/risk reduction period and they are not fully aware of their roles and responsibilities. (Ahmed & Others, 2016) It is also found that those UDMC did not hold any meeting during the warning and recovery periods, and the number of the meetings held during disaster period is less than what is prescribed by the Standing Order on Disaster (SOD). (Ahmed & Others, 2016) Nevertheless, in a study on the Role of community based local institutions for climate change adaptation in the Teesta riverine area in Rangpur District found positive result of community involvement. (Karim & Thiel, 2017) The study focused on local community level Village Disaster Management Committee (VDMC), a village level disaster management body which is an recent initiative in the disaster prone villages consists of a total 30 members. The research found that the community involvement has adaptive positive outcomes in terms of migration, food storing and adopting new tolerant crop varieties and *Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services* (RDRS) plays a significant role to facilitate the adaptation measures. The research, nevertheless, identified lack of coordination among local government, NGOs and civil partners in working together in the process. (Karim & Thiel, 2017)

Besides the initiatives under local government, most of the community involvement in Bangladesh is seen as NGO initiative. Bangladesh government took an NGO centric policy for adaptive governance of climate change and community involvement in the process. It obvious for that most notable CBOs working for climate vulnerabilities are NGO facilitated. For example, Pani Committee's (Water Committee) advocacy campaign in the southwest region and women producers in the northwest region are supported under different programs of *CARE, Bangladesh*. (Asia Foundation, 2012) In another case, *Caritas Bangladesh* and its local partner, *Sushilon*, extended help to the local communities for cleaning ponds in southwestern Bangladesh for sources of drinking water for the local people. (Alam, 2018) "*Action Aid Bangladesh*" facilitate community peoples in building multi-hazard resilient houses to make them self-protective from climatic hazards in the vulnerable ecological zone in the Jamuna river basin. (Ahmed C., 2017) Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan' (BCCSAP) of 2009 illustrated a success story of a community organization of a charland village in Mighty Padma river called 'Sona MollarDangi' where people raised their households up to the level of 1998 flood with the help of a local UK funded NGO Faridpur Development Agency(FDA). 'Sona MollarDangi' is a small island village with 26 hose holds(approximately 250 people)

which was first inhabited by a village elder Sona Molla and the village is named after him. In 1998, the village went under water for weeks and it was thought that next flood will not occur within 10 years. However, due to climate change, floods show unusual frequency. In 2004 and 2007, the village again went under water by devastating flood. Sona Molla felt the need of community response to face the problem. UK funded local NGO Faridpur Development Agency (FDA) came to help the village community effort and the villagers able to raise their all 26 households by 1.5 feet that is the water level of 1998 flood. (Bangladesh, 2009). In this case it can be observed that NGO facilitated community effort is recognized in a top policy of the nation and CBOs are seen as a joint action between NGOs and people.

In NAPA, CBOs are considered as secondary implementing agencies along with NGOs. In fact, most of the CBOs in Bangladesh are either NGO funded or NGO facilitated. However, it is difficult to estimate the numbers of CBOs working for climate vulnerabilities. Nevertheless, those CBOs lacks access to participation in mainstream policy framework in local, regional, and national level and those organizations operate in a top down administrative structure. Though, Community-based approaches are advocated by the government of Bangladesh, the approach is prominent in policy papers, not in reality. The Community initiatives that did not emerged from Government or NGO formulas find difficulties to sustain the organizations. ‘AsharAlo ‘ emerged as a CBO in the south-western part of the country, now turns to an NGO. The community organization started in 1994 with the leadership of Abu Abdulah Al-Azad along with some young enthusiastic social workers and entrepreneurs in Satkhira to address the recurrent occurrence of natural disasters and poor socio-economic conditions of the area. It turned to more organized non-political and non-profitable organizational structure in its actions in 2001 and 2006 through the registration with Social Welfare Department and NGO Affairs Bureau respectively of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh. Though, community organization is cumulative effort, it requires an organization structure, and government support and recognition. In case of AsharAlo, funding and government recognition was a big challenge for the organization. Moreover, in government policy and action plan, CBOs are seen only as secondary tier agencies. In a volatile political landscape of clientism, it is difficult to survive as community organization and the organization find it profitable to become NGO to go for foreign funds. Bangladesh can be depicted as a land of NGOs as lots of NGOs are working in different sectors. (Ahasan& Gardner, 2016) It is argued that the rise of NGOs in Bangladesh happened at the cost of the decline of state responsibilities. NGOs in Bangladesh are depicted as Shadow State that substitute the tasks of public institutions. (Karim L., 2011, p. xviii) Jeffrey Wood argued that the franchising out of state responsibilities by the NGOs caused citizens to depend on NGOs and intermediate Donor agencies rather than on the state. (Wood, 1994) Sarah White see a decline in state legitimacy by the rise of NGOs that NGOs role in Bangladesh is understand as a role of

civil society .(White, 1999) In fact, an NGO culture prevails in the country where it is usual to seek foreign funds and then operate accordingly to fulfill the targeted goals set by the development partners. In a centralized system of government with partnership of NGOs give little access to independent community organizations. Moreover, the community organizations have fragile organization capabilities due to its nature.

### **CBO's engagement, Corruption and Governance Challenges in Bangladesh**

The country has adopted new policies and fund for the upcoming challenges of climate change. It can be said that, there is a significant development in policy level and fund raising for climate projects in the last decade by the government. However, climate change governance is facing some challenges in terms of procedures and objectives. It is difficult to estimate which project will be prioritized on the merit of the urgency as the climate change impacts slowly. Moreover, the government seems not interested to mainstream the climate policy in all development planning. However, corruption is the major challenge of the nation for effective climate governance to achieve resilience society. Corruption is recognized as one of the good governance barriers for adaptive measures to fight climate change in Bangladesh. (Bhuiyan, 2015) Moreover, it is alleged that the climate fund project faced huge corruption and irregularities and did not achieve any climate goal due to prevalence of fraud project (Samakal, 2015) It is reported that political influence plays a role over the allocation of climate resources (TIB, 2014) A study in the southwest coastal area of Bangladesh investigates the impacts of bribery and extortion on livelihoods and adaptive capacities of local communities and showed that corruption significantly reduces the ability to respond to climatic stressors. (Rahman, 2018) It is thought that CBOs can work as effective body from the root and generate transparency and accountability that can check corruption. However, most government funded project are designed to implement thorough NGOs sanctions and CBOs did not get any preference. In a TIB report, it is noticed that only one fund(PPCR) has recognized CBOs as a partner. (TIB, 2013).In fact, NGOs have been getting priority for climate fund in the country and these sanctions are made in an ineffective manner and based on highly political calculation. For example, in a report it is alleged that half of 63 NGOs that got government fund in 2013 have no experience to this kind of activities and 10 of them are managed by ruling party people. (Mahmud I., 2010) In another report it is shown that there are lots of irregularities in Climate fund of the country. (Mahmud I., 2013) CBO is sought to be active in climate related matters, however, little success is attained. Union disaster management committee is modified as CBO to fight disaster and climate variability; however, the practice did not get prominence from prime decision-making body. It is thought that involvement of CBOs can be an effective way to fight corruption in climate related projects. However, in NGO targeted formula of implementing climate project in patron-client environment in Bangladesh society, limited success can only be expected if collective actions of community are not encompassed.



## Conclusion

For Bangladesh, coping with projected climate situation is crucial for her own existence in future. In the fight against the adverse effect of climate change, engaging community is an important instrument for effective governance and CBOs role is considered an essential tool in this regard. This paper systematically examines the policy and institutional framework of climate governance of the country in regard with CBOs role in the process. Nonetheless, the country has successfully adopted different policies and plans concerning climate change governance to involve community participation. However, it is observed that most Community Organizations working on climate vulnerabilities and adaptation are either NGO funded or facilitated. In fact, government considers CBOs only as secondary agencies of the procedure, and NGOs got top priority in policies and implementation mechanism. Therefore, in the NGO friendly make up of whole setup, CBOs will have little space to engage community involvement from the root. Moreover, Corruption and prevailing socio-political culture drives against the meaningful involvement of communities from the root through the assistance of NGOs. In this perspective, this paper argues that CBOs has little prospect to engage in governance process of climate change in existing policy and institutional framework. Therefore, inclusive governance strategy engaging CBOs to facilitate community participation is suggested through creating space in the framework of climate policies and institutions.

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