

APRIL 2013

## OVERVIEW

### IIED Climate Change Group

**Project name:**

Loss and damage in vulnerable countries

**Project leader:**

Saleemul Huq

**Time frame:**

Ongoing from November 2011

**Cost:**

£100,000

**Objective:**

To enhance the understanding of loss and damage and approaches to address the same amongst a wide range of stakeholders in Bangladesh.

## PROJECT SUMMARY

The world's best efforts cannot prevent climate change from causing harm in vulnerable countries. In 2010, UN climate negotiations established a work programme to consider how to deal with this 'loss and damage'. Seeking better understanding, the Government of Bangladesh asked the Climate and Development Knowledge Network to support research on loss and damage in developing countries worldwide. A consortium of international organisations is carrying out the initiative. In Bangladesh, the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) has facilitated research and dialogue among stakeholders. The national process has produced seven studies and built awareness and alliances.

## THEORY OF CHANGE

Despite wide agreement that developing countries are least responsible for climate change and most vulnerable to its impacts, the full implications of that vulnerability have rarely been discussed. Although loss and damage is not a new concept, international discussions have often put it off as something to think about in the future. But it has become clear that loss and damage is already occurring in many countries. It is also evident that a range of tools will need to be employed in response. What we don't know is which

# Dealing with unavoidable climate costs

Climate change will bring loss and damage we can't mitigate or adapt to. Bangladesh is looking at how to address the risks.

A storm surge smashes a fishing village. Droughts halve a country's maize harvest one year after another. For decades, international debates over climate change have focused on cutting emissions and supporting adaptation to prevent or lessen the pain from these kinds of impacts.

But mitigation and adaptation cannot neutralise climate disruption. Past emissions continue to drive up global temperatures, while countries struggle to commit to meaningful reductions. Some crises can be seen but not stopped — think of rising seas inundating low-lying islands like the Maldives. Others will come by surprise, or will simply overwhelm the adaptive capacity of poor and vulnerable people.

In the UN climate negotiations, 'loss and damage from climate change' refers to the harm and costs from those impacts we can't prevent or adapt to. The idea took years to get traction, but in 2010 the parties agreed to establish a work programme to better understand what loss and damage means.

Bangladesh, long a pioneer on adaptation research, has now become a laboratory for addressing loss and damage. Needing to know more about the emerging issue, the government initiated a global project funded by the Climate and Development Knowledge

Network. The Loss and Damage in Vulnerable Countries Initiative has been working worldwide with a consortium of international organisations including Germanwatch, the United Nations University Institute for Environment and Human Security, the Munich Climate Insurance Initiative and the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD). The starting point is research in Bangladesh organised by ICCCAD with support from IIED.

### Steep learning curve

ICCCAD brought in the best-known climate researchers in Bangladesh, such as the leading water expert and television personality Ainun Nishat, and the former director of the Bangladesh Institute for Development Studies, Mohammed Asaduzzaman. These top scientists have standing with policymakers that will help the research produce results. That said, they still faced a steep learning curve with the new concept of loss and damage.

Mechanisms like insurance or social safety nets can be used to handle the risk of destructive climate change, but it takes time to untangle these possibilities and see how they differ from adaptation. There are political complications as well. In Bangladesh, many are adamant that poor farmers should not have to buy

tools will work in which places. This project aimed at helping policymakers and other stakeholders in Bangladesh better understand how loss and damage might be addressed in their national context. For other countries interested in pursuing their own national processes on loss and damage, the work in Bangladesh could provide a roadmap.

## KEY LESSONS LEARNT & INNOVATIONS

- Loss and damage is a new focus for climate action. Before researchers and stakeholders can start to address it, they need time to understand how loss and damage work differs from mitigation and adaptation.
- Bringing in some of the country's top scientists helps ensure that research influences policy. We also need to build momentum in this unfamiliar area by networking, spreading ideas and linking together government agencies and other stakeholders.
- Loss and damage is where climate change and disaster management overlap. Here we can find common ground between two groups of experts who often have a hard time talking to each other.

## PARTNERS' VIEW

*It has been highly rewarding, professionally as well as intellectually, working with the ICCCAD team on various aspects of loss and damage. The BRAC University team concentrated on developing the range of approaches to loss and damage as well as developing the knowledge base of slow onset events related to sea level rise in Bangladesh. Debates that we had with the ICCCAD team were stimulating and thought provoking. In addition, their support on editorial issues is highly appreciated as loss and damage is the emerging issue in the domain of climate change.*

Professor Ainun Nishat  
BRAC University, Bangladesh

## IIED CLIMATE CHANGE GROUP

Working in collaboration with partner organisations and individuals in developing countries, the Climate Change Group has been leading the field on adaptation to climate change issues.



Photo: Espen Rasmussen

Some climate disruption cannot be dealt with through adaptation or mitigation.

insurance when they barely contribute to the threats. The tension over who is responsible is compounded by technical limitations — some specific instances of loss and damage can be attributed to human-induced climate change, but many others are less clear-cut.

Even the definition of loss and damage is not yet widely agreed upon. Bangladesh is the first country to tackle this problem, and the researchers had to find approaches that made sense. To help with this, ICCCAD engaged in an open dialogue with stakeholders including government, academics, international and national NGOs, and community-based organisations. Stakeholder workshops helped to define the seven studies that the project commissioned, and reflected on the early results.

We also learned that additional support would be useful going forward. Feedback from the research team suggested that more consultation among researchers or collaboration with international consultants could help the process of mapping out the field and developing capacity.

## Building buy-in

Beyond the research activities, we worked to raise awareness and build social capital. This project is not just about producing seven papers — it was crucial to meet with key people, find champions, be seen at workshops and discuss loss and damage formally and informally, to create momentum and develop the partnerships that will put research into practice on the ground. We have helped key stakeholders create useful networks and alliances, especially in government agencies.

For instance, one of the gaps in most adaptation efforts has been that climate

experts and disaster management experts have separate niches and often don't understand each other well. We found that the issue of loss and damage can bring the two groups together and give them common ground for discussion. An opportunity to build on this synergy arose in Bangladesh when the secretary of the environment ministry became the secretary of the disaster management ministry. At our last stakeholder workshop, this official proposed a pilot programme on loss and damage under his new ministry.

Such pilots would allow ICCCAD to start testing ways to address loss and damage. As we move into this learning-by-doing stage, we first would like to complete a needs and vulnerability assessment with a strong fieldwork component. We have also been discussing the possibility of establishing a group of experts that would explore options for a national mechanism to address loss and damage in Bangladesh.

Other governments have expressed interest in learning from the work in Bangladesh, and disseminating the lessons will be part of the ongoing global project. As more countries begin to take a hard look at the unavoidable costs of climate change, we will keep supporting research, dialogue and networking efforts. All these are essential — researchers can define and assess loss and damage, but we need buy-in and alliances of other stakeholders to drive the response.

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