A BREAF OF DEVELOPMENT CONTEXT-KHULNA, BANGLADESH

Locally Led Solutions for a Climate-Resilient and Inclusive Future

A development perspective on Bangladesh and the coastal Khulna region, prepared for UN agencies, bilateral and multilateral partners, international NGOs, foundations and mission-driven collaborators.

SECTION 1 | Development Context

Bangladesh's progress and the evolving role of NGOs.



Bangladesh has achieved substantial progress in human development since independence. Expanded access to education, improved life expectancy, women's participation in the economy, disaster preparedness and access to electricity have helped reshape the country's development trajectory. These gains have resulted from the combined contributions of public institutions, communities, civil society, the private sector and development partners. Yet persistent poverty, unequal opportunity, pressure on public services and rising climate exposure threaten to slow or reverse progress, particularly for households living in vulnerable geographies [1].

Bangladesh's NGO sector has long complemented public systems by organizing communities, extending essential services, supporting microenterprise and livelihoods, responding to emergencies and demonstrating locally workable innovations. NGOs also help translate excluded populations' needs into programme design and public dialogue. As priorities shift from stand-alone service provision to sustainable systems, the value of capable local organizations increasingly lies in their contextual intelligence, trusted relationships, inclusive outreach and ability to make resources accountable to communities.

An evolving development agenda

- **From delivery to resilience.** Development efforts must combine social protection and basic services with anticipatory risk reduction, climate adaptation and economically viable livelihoods.
- **From projects to systems.** Locally embedded organizations can connect household needs to union, upazila and municipal plans, public services and market actors rather than building parallel arrangements.

- **From participation to shared decision-making.** Meaningful representation of women, youth, people with disabilities and marginalized groups is vital in priority-setting, budgeting and monitoring.
- **From outputs to learning.** Strong monitoring, evaluation, accountability and learning (MEAL), responsible financial controls and accessible feedback channels help make funding more effective and transparent.

For international development partners, this creates a practical opportunity: partner with accountable local organizations that can co-design programmes with communities, verify context-specific risks and sustain benefits beyond a funding cycle.

SECTION 2 | Coastal Challenges

Climate vulnerability, WASH, livelihoods, health and inequality.

Intersecting risks in Khulna and southwestern Bangladesh



Coastal Khulna sits within a wider southwestern landscape of estuaries, waterways, tidal plains and settlements closely connected to the Sundarbans. Communities in Khulna, Satkhira and Bagerhat experience overlapping environmental and socioeconomic pressures. Saline intrusion, cyclones, storm surges, tidal flooding, drainage congestion, riverbank erosion and disrupted ecosystems can combine with insecure income, weak infrastructure and limited service access. These stresses seldom occur in isolation: the same household may face a damaged water source, reduced earnings, health risks and debt after a single shock

Priority dimensions of vulnerability

- **Climate and disaster risk.** Cyclones and tidal surges threaten shelter, assets, farmland, roads and community facilities. Risk differs across low-lying rural unions, embankment-side settlements and densely populated urban/peri-urban areas.
- **Water, sanitation and hygiene.** Salinity and contamination can limit reliable drinking-water access. Safe water storage, resilient water technologies, sanitation services and locally maintained systems are central to health and dignity.
- **Health and nutrition.** Flooding, inadequate WASH, constrained access to primary healthcare and reduced food diversity can compound maternal, child and adolescent health vulnerabilities and the burden on caregivers.
- **Livelihoods and food security.** Farming, fishing, aquaculture, day labour and small enterprises are sensitive to environmental change, market disruptions and volatile production conditions. Skills, finance and climate-smart value chains matter.
- **Gender and social exclusion.** Women and girls often carry disproportionate unpaid care and water-collection responsibilities. People with disabilities, older people, landless families and minority communities may face additional access barriers.
- **Mobility and urban pressure.** Repeated climate shocks can contribute to migration and increased demand for affordable housing, sanitation, drainage, jobs and public health services in Khulna's urban and peri-urban settlements.



Why an integrated response is essential?

A water intervention may improve safety but fall short without community management, inclusive access and income security; livelihood support may fail without climate-risk information, market connections and functioning WASH services. Evidence from gender-responsive coastal adaptation program in Khulna, Bagerhat and Satkhira Patuakhali district highlights the value of combining women-led resilient livelihoods with safe drinking-water systems and institutional capacity-building. The development imperative is therefore not simply to rebuild after shocks, but to reduce underlying exposure, strengthen capabilities and protect gains over time.

SECTION 3 | Locally Led & Nature based Solutions (NbS);

Community participation, inclusive programming and GRACE's approach.

From listening to shared ownership

GRACE is a women-led, Khulna-based development organization committed to practical, inclusive and climate-responsive development through NbS. Its approach begins with communities: listening to lived experience, recognizing existing knowledge and capacities, identifying multidimensional vulnerabilities and involving residents in decisions that affect their lives. This emphasis is especially relevant where a technically sound intervention may otherwise overlook local water practices, livelihood seasons, mobility constraints or household responsibilities.

Locally led development does not mean working in isolation. GRACE seeks to connect community priorities with government systems, technical expertise, development financing and responsible private-sector participation. Its role is to help make that collaboration equitable, culturally appropriate, evidence-informed and responsive to community feedback.

Program design principles

- **Participatory evidence.** Combine community consultation, vulnerability assessment, disaggregated data and local risk mapping to identify who is underserved and why.
- **Gender equality and inclusion.** Create meaningful space for women's leadership, youth participation and accessibility for persons with disabilities and marginalized populations.
- **Integrated programming.** Bring together climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction, public health, nutrition, WASH, livelihoods and social protection where needs intersect.
- **Resilient service delivery.** Prioritize technologies and services that communities can safely operate, maintain, finance and adapt to changing environmental conditions.
- **Accountability and safeguarding.** Use accessible complaints and feedback mechanisms, do-no-harm safeguards, transparent resource management and clear referral pathways.
- **Learning and sustainability.** Monitor results, test assumptions, document what works, adapt implementation and plan early for community or institutional ownership.



Illustrative pathways to impact

In coastal water security, this can mean jointly selecting climate-resilient drinking-water options and establishing inclusive operation-and-maintenance arrangements. In women's livelihoods, it can mean combining practical skills, productive assets, savings, market access and household engagement to improve both income and decision-making power. In disaster preparedness, it can mean connecting early-warning information, volunteers, first aid, evacuation accessibility and local government coordination. These are potential programme pathways, not claims of completed GRACE results.

GRACE's core proposition is straightforward: communities should participate not only in receiving services, but also in diagnosing problems, shaping solutions, checking quality and defining whether the intervention has delivered meaningful change.

GRACE Project Design Process

GRACE follows a systematic and participatory project design process to ensure programmes are relevant, inclusive and sustainable.

Step 1: Needs Assessment
Identify community needs, challenges and priorities through consultations, surveys and field assessments.

Step 2: Programme Planning
Develop project objectives, activities, indicators, budget and implementation strategies based on evidence and stakeholder inputs.

Step 3: Stakeholder Engagement
Engage communities, government authorities, partners and other stakeholders to ensure ownership and collaboration.

Step 4: Proposal Development
Prepare technically sound project proposals aligned with donor requirements, organizational priorities and development goals.

Step 5: Implementation Planning
Establish work plans, roles, timelines, risk management strategies and MEAL mechanisms for effective delivery.

Step 6: Review and Approval
Conduct internal quality reviews and finalize project designs before implementation.

Step 7: Continuous Improvement
Use monitoring, evaluation and learning findings to adapt activities and strengthen project outcomes.

COLLABORATION AND INVESTMENT

SECTION 4 | Partnership Opportunities

Opportunities for Government, UN agencies, INGOs, embassies NGO's and development partners.

Partnership with GRACE: Local Leadership Driving Sustainable Impact

At GRACE, we believe that lasting change happens when local communities lead, women shape solutions, and partnerships empower action. As a women-led, locally rooted organization, GRACE works with communities in climate-vulnerable coastal Bangladesh to co-create innovative solutions that strengthen resilience, protect ecosystems and improve livelihoods.

Through Nature-Based Solutions (NbS), localization and community-driven approaches, GRACE bridges local knowledge with global expertise to deliver impactful, inclusive and sustainable development outcomes. We invite donors, development partners, research institutions and responsible organizations to join us in building resilient communities where local leadership, women's empowerment and environmental sustainability drive transformational change.

4.1 A practical platform for co-design and delivery



The scale and interconnected nature of coastal challenges require partnerships across government, UN agencies, embassies, bilateral and multilateral donors, international NGOs, research institutions, foundations and private-sector actors. GRACE welcomes collaboration that respects local leadership while bringing together catalytic funding, technical capabilities, policy influence and rigorous evidence. Partnerships may begin with joint assessment or pilot design and evolve toward longer-term programmes where feasibility, safeguards and shared objectives are demonstrated.

4.2 Why Partner with GRACE?

GRACE believes that sustainable development begins with **local leadership, community ownership and inclusive partnerships**. As a **women-led and locally rooted organization**, A bulk of NGO and INGO experts in the leadership position GRACE works with climate-vulnerable communities in coastal Bangladesh to develop solutions that are grounded in local knowledge, strengthened by evidence and connected with global development priorities.

Our partnership approach is built around **localization** — shifting from delivering solutions *for* communities to creating solutions *with* communities. We empower local actors, especially women and marginalized groups, to lead change, influence decisions and drive sustainable development outcomes.

GRACE brings strong expertise in designing and implementing Nature-Based Solutions (NbS) that strengthen climate resilience, protect ecosystems and improve community livelihoods. By combining indigenous knowledge, scientific evidence and community participation, GRACE supports solutions that are environmentally sustainable, socially inclusive and locally owned

Strengths of GRACE:

Locally Rooted, Globally Connected

GRACE combines deep community understanding with international development standards. As a locally rooted organization, GRACE has trusted relationships with climate-vulnerable communities and works to ensure that solutions are shaped by local priorities, knowledge and leadership.

Women-Led Leadership for Inclusive Change

As a women-led organization, GRACE places women's leadership, participation and empowerment at the heart of development. We promote inclusive approaches where women, youth and vulnerable groups actively contribute to decision-making and community transformation.

Strong Expertise in Climate Resilience and Nature-Based Solutions

GRACE has specialized experience in designing and implementing **climate adaptation, disaster risk reduction and Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)** that strengthen ecosystem health, protect livelihoods and build resilient communities in vulnerable coastal areas.

Community-Driven and Locally Led Approaches

GRACE believes sustainable impact is achieved when communities are not only beneficiaries but also **leaders, partners and decision-makers**. Our participatory approach strengthens ownership, accountability and long-term sustainability of interventions.

Evidence-Based Programming and Strong MEAL Systems

GRACE applies robust **Monitoring, Evaluation, Accountability and Learning (MEAL)** systems to measure results, generate evidence and continuously improve programme quality. Data-driven decision-making enables transparent reporting and effective resource utilization.

Strong Partnership and Collaboration Capacity

GRACE builds strategic partnerships with government institutions, development partners, research organizations, civil society actors and communities to maximize collective impact and promote localization.

Transparent Governance and Accountable Management

GRACE maintains strong organizational governance, financial accountability and responsible programme management systems aligned with donor expectations and good development practices.

Innovation and Adaptability in a Changing Climate, Health Nutrition and WASH, Green energy, and Education and development

GRACE continuously explores innovative approaches, including digital solutions, green energy, climate-smart livelihoods and community-based adaptation models to respond effectively to emerging challenges.

Experienced Local Team with Contextual Knowledge

GRACE's dedicated team brings practical experience in community engagement, programme implementation, capacity building and managing development interventions in complex and climate-vulnerable contexts.

Our Partnership Value

GRACE offers donors more than programme implementation — we provide a trusted local partnership platform that connects community voices, technical expertise and sustainable solutions to create measurable and lasting impact.

4.3 Key Partnership Strengths

A. Nature-Based Solutions (NbS)

GRACE promotes nature-positive approaches that work with ecosystems to address climate and development challenges.
Key areas include:

- Ecosystem restoration and conservation
- Climate-resilient agriculture
- Community-based natural resource management
- Biodiversity protection
- Coastal resilience and adaptation solutions
- Sustainable livelihoods linked with ecosystem protection

GRACE believes healthy ecosystems create resilient communities.

B. Locally Led Development

GRACE places local communities at the centre of decision-making and programme implementation.
Our locally led approach ensures:

- Communities define their priorities and solutions.
- Local knowledge and experiences guide interventions.
- Local institutions and leaders are strengthened.
- Communities become active partners, not only beneficiaries.
- Development results remain sustainable beyond project periods.

C. Women-Led Leadership and Inclusive Action

As a women-led organization, GRACE recognizes women as powerful drivers of transformation.
Our approach focuses on:

- Strengthening women's leadership and decision-making.
- Supporting women-led climate action and livelihood initiatives.
- Increasing women's participation in community governance.
- Creating opportunities for vulnerable women and girls.
- Promoting gender-responsive and inclusive development.

GRACE believes that empowered women build stronger families, communities and ecosystems.

D. Partnership for Localization and Local Leadership

GRACE promotes a partnership model where **local leadership leads, communities own and partners support**.
We collaborate with:

- Local communities and community-based organizations
- Government institutions
- Civil society organizations
- Research institutions
- Development partners
- Private sector actors

Through equitable partnerships, GRACE connects local realities with technical expertise, resources and innovation to create greater impact.

4.4 Priority areas for collaboration

RACE welcomes strategic partnerships with donors, development agencies, research institutions and responsible actors to co-create locally led, inclusive and climate-resilient solutions. Our collaboration priorities are designed to address interconnected challenges while strengthening community leadership, ecosystem sustainability and long-term impact.

GRACE welcomes partnerships focused on:

Nature-Based Solutions, Climate Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction

GRACE advances nature-positive and community-led approaches that strengthen resilience against climate shocks and disasters. We collaborate on community resilience planning, anticipatory action, local preparedness, ecosystem-sensitive adaptation and recovery approaches that reduce future risks and protect vulnerable communities.

Water Security, Health, Nutrition and WASH

GRACE promotes climate-resilient essential services that improve community well-being and reduce vulnerability. Partnership opportunities include resilient WASH systems, preventive health outreach, maternal and adolescent health support, nutrition-sensitive interventions and strengthened referral pathways for underserved populations.

Inclusive Livelihoods and Women's Economic Empowerment

GRACE supports women-led and climate-responsive livelihood transformation by creating pathways for economic inclusion and sustainable income generation. Collaboration areas include skills development, productive assets, savings-led inclusion, entrepreneurship, market access and livelihood diversification adapted to changing climate realities.

Evidence, Urban Resilience and Systems Strengthening

GRACE partners to generate evidence, strengthen local systems and improve development effectiveness. Priority areas include multidimensional vulnerability assessments, inclusive urban and peri-urban service planning, programme learning, research and strengthening the capacity of local organizations.

Green Energy and Low-Carbon Development

GRACE promotes clean and renewable energy solutions, including solar energy and biogas technologies, to improve energy access, reduce dependence on traditional fuels and support climate-resilient communities. Through community-based green energy initiatives, GRACE contributes to sustainable livelihoods, reduced carbon emissions and a transition towards a low-carbon future.

4.5 How Partnership Can Work

GRACE believes partnerships should be based on **trust, equality and shared purpose**.

Partnership opportunities include:

Strategic Partnerships

Co-creating long-term solutions aligned with community priorities and sustainable development goals.

Technical Partnerships

Sharing expertise, innovation, research and knowledge to improve program quality.

Resource Partnerships

Mobilizing financial and technical resources to scale locally led solutions.

Learning Partnerships

Generating evidence, documenting good practices and influencing wider development approaches.

4.6 Commitment to accountable partnerships

GRACE is committed to partnerships that are:

Locally Owned – Communities and local leaders drive priorities and decisions.

Women Empowering – Women's voices, leadership and participation are central.

Transparent and Accountable – Strong governance, MEAL systems and responsible resource management guide our work.

Inclusive and Equitable – Vulnerable groups are meaningfully engaged and represented.

Sustainable and Impact-Oriented – Partnerships create lasting environmental, social and economic change.

PARTNERSHIP INVITATION | Together with partners, GRACE aims to accelerate locally led climate action, empower women as change-makers and build resilient communities where people and nature thrive together.



Md. Mamun Or Rashid
Executive Director, GRACE
Mamun.rashid@gracebd.net
Mobile: +8801725415410
WhatsApp: +8801725415140