



# CASE STUDY

## CONCERN WORLDWIDE BANGLADESH

### Empowering communities to advocate for their own resilience

This case study shows how simultaneously providing communities with hard evidence of capacities and needs and strengthening community-government relationships can lead to local government investment in resilience.

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#### Key Alliance terminology

##### Zurich Flood Resilience Alliance (Alliance):

The Alliance is a multi-sector collaboration between the humanitarian sector, academia, and the private sector focusing on shifting from the traditional emphasis on post-event recovery to pre-event resilience. We are nine years into an eleven-year program that has been delivered in two Phases (Phase I from 2013-2018; Phase II from 2018-2024).

##### Flood Resilience Measurement for Communities (FRMC):

Created by the Alliance in 2013, the FRMC is a framework and associated web-based data tool/app which conceptualizes flood resilience as a function of social, human, natural, physical, and financial capitals. The FRMC is implemented at the beginning of Alliance work to assess resilience strengths and gaps. This information is used to shape community programs and advocacy.

#### The win

By brokering community-government relationships, co-producing evidence-based knowledge on community flood resilience needs, and building community capacity to manage flood risk and advocate for themselves, Concern Worldwide Bangladesh (Concern) has:

- Supported 21 char communities in Bangladesh to overcome the mindset that “floods are a regular event that will happen and we have to suffer”.
- Influenced local government investment in community flood resilience activities. Institutes, including the Department of Public Health and Engineering (DPHE), Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Department of Livestock (DLS), and the Bangladesh Institute of Nuclear Agriculture (BINA), have started investing in activities such as installing flood-resilient tube wells, providing livestock vaccination and treatment, distributing climate-tolerant seed, elevating and protecting roads, and repairing bridges.



*Community Resilience Action Groups receive Napier Grass cuttings from the Department of Livestock, Hatibandha, November 2021 © Noor Islam*

## How the win was achieved

Communities living in the floodplains of Bangladesh have always been vulnerable to flooding and erosion, and that vulnerability is increasing as development and climate change result in intensified flooding. This is particularly true for char communities — communities that live on highly exposed, vegetated islands in the rivers on the floodplain. For these communities, recurring floods regularly devastate livelihoods, assets, and access to basic services. The communities are aware of their flood risk but lack both strategies to address that risk and sufficient external support to address their needs; consequently, they heavily depend on relief to survive and recover. Concern has been working since 2018 with 21 char communities to increase their flood resilience both locally and by strengthening their connection with local government.

### Building initial government engagement

Concern used several approaches to engage local government and other government

officials, but the FRMC process was a particularly powerful element because of the multiple entry points it provides for engagement and building understanding. As part of the FRMC data collection, interviews and focus group discussions were used to directly engage with key government stakeholders and build relationships. The FRMC validation process — triangulating between community FRMC results, the communities themselves, and government officials — involved most of the relevant departments and stakeholders, supported the credibility of the results, and raised awareness and buy-in among local flood resilience actors.

The FRMC approach is also powerful because of how it takes a broad, systems thinking approach. In areas where Concern is working, there are no other organizations or projects working directly on resilience, either conceptually or in practice; the closest related work is water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) work and plinth raising. Even preparedness efforts have only happened sporadically or at the individual level — not with



Health Camp Vati Kapasia, Sundarganj, Gaibandha, May 2020 © Sofura Khatun

the whole community. But when communities see the FRMC results, they understand that the whole context is coming out through the survey. This, in turn, has inspired community members to come forward; the FRMC results validate their existing knowledge and package it into a format that helps them communicate their situation and needs to government officials.

### Documenting needs in local plans

After completing and sharing the FRMC baseline information, Concern began working with the communities on using FRMC data to develop Community Action Plans. The plans determine which interventions are most needed and identify relevant departments and government officials to engage with. However, the Community Action Planning process was, whenever possible, done independently of government officials so communities could speak freely and discuss pros and cons of existing government interventions.

Once complete, each Community Action Plan was presented to the entire community and the community chose representatives to lead the

advocacy process. These representatives presented the community's plan to government officials and shared areas where close collaboration would be needed to make the community more prepared and less vulnerable to floods. Thereafter, communities and government officials worked together on Joint Action Plans to plan out specific activities and interventions. For example, in collaboration with agriculture departments, it was determined that flood tolerant seeds could help farmers cultivate certain crops through the flood season and maintain their livelihoods. Accordingly, DAE provided training on flood tolerant cropping, coupled with post-flood support such as seeds, fertilizer, seedlings, etc. BINA agreed to provide flood tolerant rice varieties. Where tube wells were installed to provide safe drinking water during floods, but were compromised by flood water, DPHE thought to modify the design to protect these sources of water from floods. Similarly, the DLS agreed to provide vaccinations and deworming tablets for livestock. Where communities have been successful in their asks of government, the successes become self-reinforcing; the communities



*Bambo Bridge set up by Community Resilience Action Group at Nichseksundar, Hatibandha, July 2022 © Ohidul Islam, FC Concern Worldwide*

are motivated to take increasing responsibility, recognizing it will generate mutual benefit.

### **Expanding government buy-in through demonstration, co-financing, and technical support**

As part of the Joint Action Planning process, exposure visits were organized to bring government officials to these remote char areas to bear witness to the challenges and understand why certain services and interventions were requested. Government interest in addressing issues in the char areas had been built through the FRMC, knowledge-building, and project update processes that Concern implemented from early on in the program. Exposure visits continued through the implementation phase and still take place twice a year for progress reviews. Ongoing visits have kept government officials engaged in the project, connecting the community with government departments, services, and facilities.

Concern has also used co-financing to maintain government interest, engagement, and investment. With financial support from Concern and in-kind support from communities, a 1000-foot section of road was constructed in one community, giving approximately 1000 households who had previously regularly been cut off by floods more reliable road access. Community members said construction of this road addressed 20 years of suffering. The community is now independently planning the road's management and maintenance and demanding additional support from the Union Parishad to complete the road. The Union Parishad Chairman visited and committed to support the community's efforts.

Similarly, advocacy from government departments is also gaining momentum. For example, after working with the communities on modified tube wells, DPHE recognized that the updated design could be replicated and scaled up to other flood prone and char areas. DPHE is now interested in

influencing national government to take up the model and fund its scaling. In the process, it has requested support from Concern for project data and joint advocacy to push this forward and get national government to take up outside-the-box solutions and pilots.

Due to growing interest in national-level advocacy, Concern has increased its engagement with national government to build buy-in to their local work and the need to close funding and policy gaps. With Practical Action, Concern organized a national workshop where communities and local government presented their local efforts, constraints, and needs to national-level policymakers, NGOs, and donors. This has resulted in Concern's inclusion in the Local Governance Support Project, funded by the World Bank and the Bangladesh government; this is an opportunity to influence a local enabling environment for better risk governance.

### **Empowering communities to become their own advocates**

Concern's model of empowering communities and brokering relationships between communities and

government — rather than Concern advocating on behalf of the communities — provides a blueprint for building long-term sustainable change that contributes to flood resilience. Concern has:

- Strengthened local relationships and knowledge by bringing together communities and local government to develop a shared understanding of local flood risk and resilience and collaborate in joint planning.
- Organized 'exposure visits' for government officials, allowing those officials to experience and understand for themselves the benefits of flood resilience interventions to communities.
- Empowered communities to directly approach government to advocate for their flood resilience priorities and suggest practical investments and activities.

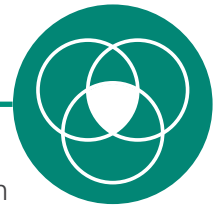
As communities take the initiative and ask for support, local governments become more invested in these remote, vulnerable areas. Empowered by their experiences, these communities are now self-organizing to better protect themselves from floods and advocate for government support to continue building resilience and investing in preparedness.



*Rescuing cattle and households from flooded chars, Kanicharitabari, June 2021 © Mijanur Rahman FF, FRP, ASOD*

# Why Alliance advocacy was successful

## ESTABLISHED RELEVANCE



- Generated community buy-in to the program and program advocacy goals by measuring and sharing comprehensive resilience data that validates community priorities and needs.
- Encouraged government investment in resilience good practices by providing co-financing and technical support in a resource- and capacity-constrained context.
- Connected community needs to government priorities by developing community resilience solutions specific to the mandates of local government institutions.

## BUILT RELATIONSHIPS



- Built pathways for influence by directly engaging decision-makers in program planning focused on community resilience needs and opportunities.
- Improved community access to government by bringing communities and governments together during program planning and via exposure visits.

## PROVIDED EVIDENCE-BASED KNOWLEDGE



- Built government knowledge of community resilience needs and issues by engaging them in community resilience data gathering and analysis.
- Empowered communities to advocate for their resilience needs by co-developing with them quantitative data on their resilience gaps and opportunities.

### Additional resources

- “Seed distribution to poor farmers in Sundarganj” (source in Bangla)
- “Government officials visited the project in Sundarganj” (source in Bangla)
- Blog post on local level media campaigns