

The stimulating role of NGOs in Bangladesh

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Water for life (photo: Mohiuddin Ahmad)

Summary

Non Governmental Organisations (NGOs) act as windows on applied knowledge and provide links to sources of information. NGOs are active in all nineteen coastal districts in Bangladesh. Among the NGOs that work exclusively in rural areas, the greater numbers are involved in water and sanitation, closely followed by environment and forestry, fisheries and micro-credits, providing small loans.

Many NGOs deal with typical coastal issues, assist in solving local coastal problems and implement programmes among selected coastal communities. In recent years, the government has initiated several development projects addressing issues of coastal zone management and targeting programmes to enhance livelihoods of the coastal population.

A number of NGOs operate both at a national level disseminating coastal knowledge and promoting sustainable development as well as at local level, assisting coastal people to recover from the effects of a typhoon.

NGOs do have special capabilities that are essential for alleviating poverty and vulnerability that are amongst the objectives of ICZM. An important advantage is their efficiency and effectiveness in reaching out to the poor especially by channelling donor support towards them.

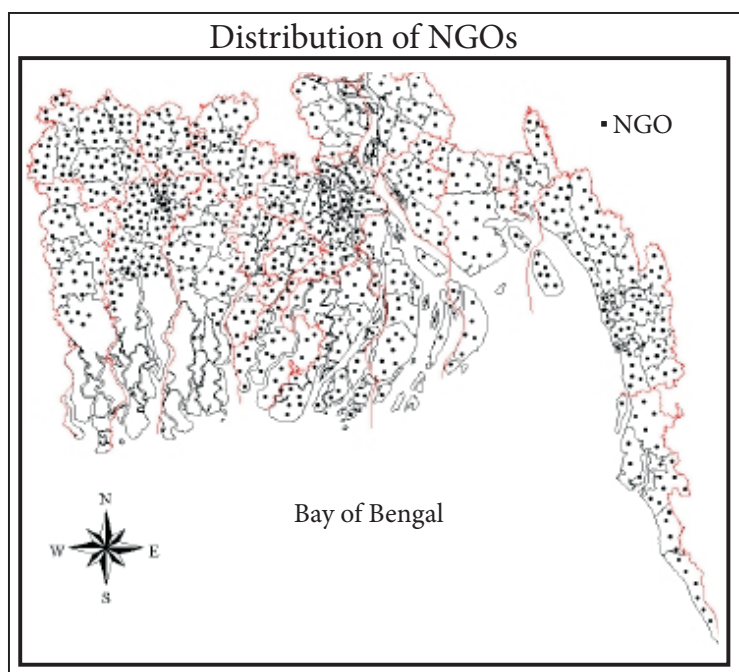
Different NGOs are acting at different levels and a growing number of NGOs play an important role in improving the living conditions of the poor coastal people.

National NGOs with a good overview of pressing coastal issues, can assist both in monitoring coastal processes and helping coastal inhabitants both before and after hazard events. An example is “Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies” (BCAS website www.bcas.net), which also acts as bridge between international and national coastal efforts for local people. BCAS is effectively disseminating knowledge on sustainable use of coastal resources (e.g. floating vegetable beds) and co-produced the valuable Bangladesh Vulnerability Assessment (see CCC II-1-1).

NGOs are also very valuable in providing a link between authorities and implementing organisations. The introduction of an overarching project: Coastwatch, can increasingly help civil society to integrate within the national and local development processes, as an important stakeholder. This may lead to greater awareness about coastal issues, better planning through stakeholder participation in media debate and promoting the voice and participation of the civil society.

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Distribution of NGOs active in the 19 coastal districts, Bangladesh. (source: PDO-ICZM, 2005)



Example 1 of the role of NGOs: Water for life

There is no well in this village of Shyamnagar Upazila in Satkhira district, as the groundwater is too saline. The pond is the only source of water and the water is filthy. Diarrhoea, dysentery skin diseases were common in almost every household. An affluent farmer has donated a 0.37-acre pond for community use. The pond was re-excavated and cleaned with support from Caritas Bangladesh and Sushilon, a local NGO. The incidence of water-borne diseases has dropped considerably. The pond is cleaned once in every three months, overseen by a five-member committee: the grammo shebok committee (rural volunteers' committee), which also looks after the maintenance fund. (photo: Mohiuddin Ahmad)



Example 2 of the role of NGOs:

Adaptation to climate change – Floating vegetable beds

Flood and water logging is a common problem in Bangladesh. A vast area of Bangladesh is situated two meters below mean sea level, affected by high tides. Climate change will aggravate the problem in the future. Evidences of adverse impacts are now already visual. The main impacts are on the livelihood of people in terms of crop loss and food insecurity. The community has developed baira cultivation as an adaptation strategy to reduce their vulnerability. BCAS with local NGOs are providing training and material to local communities to improve the floating bed cultivation and to reduce seasonal food insecurity in the coastal villages, see CCC III-3-3-8. (photo: Atiq Rahmann)