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LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

Case Study
BANGLADESH

InterAction

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LOCAL LEADERSHIP IN HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bangladesh, one of the most disaster-prone and climate-vulnerable countries in the world, encounters different types of disasters every year. These cause a loss of basic shelter for many people. There have been numerous institutional and locally adapted ways for shelter responses nationwide. This study looks into how different humanitarian shelter and settlement actors perceive localization in Bangladesh. The impacts of disasters in the overall context of the country and the Rohingya responses were studied thoroughly to understand the existing practices, gaps, and barriers.

The literature study and primary research make it clear that for the government, local actors, and international and local non-government organizations (NGOs) to use resources efficiently, they must coordinate their activities. Moreover, no other option exists besides localization to ensure maximum strategic and timely responses.

In Bangladesh, localization in shelter response is quite powerful, according to this study.

- Across the country, there are positive impacts of the inclusion of local actors at the national level:
- Local actors can access and communicate with communities.
- Local NGOs can provide cost-effective solutions relying on their knowledge of "micro-culture", and local practices.
- Local actors, including government and NGOs are cognizant of community's aspirations, acceptance, and local knowledge of construction skills, materials, and building techniques

Despite being first responders, the local organizations frequently serve as subcontractors to international NGOs. They are the indirect recipients of funding for humanitarian purposes from other international donors within the humanitarian framework. Humanitarian organizations have been altering their approach, collaborating with, and learning from various shelter actors from the ground—whether after a disaster, conflict, or displacement—substantial challenges and gaps still exist. Major findings include:

- There's no agreement yet on who's 'local.'
- Empowering local communities is fundamental to locally led responses.
- Some organizations engage communities more actively than others.
- Include local actors at the national level.
- Access and communication with the communities.
- Improvise and be flexible during times of uncertainty.
- Design cost-sensitive and cost-effective shelters by communities.
- Recognize indigenous knowledge of local construction techniques and materials
- There is a lack of shelter-specific expertise for large-scale response.
- There is a lack of coordinated shareable information.
- Few policies facilitate local leadership.
- Some organizations take an individualistic approach.
- Crowdfunding shelter initiatives is challenging.
- Local actors have limited access to financial management.
- Local actors are paid less than other actors.
- Few local actors can interpret and meet donor requirements without support.
- The Settlements Approach is not widely practiced.

Through this study, a few recommendations are made for enhancing local leadership in Shelter and Settlements Sector in the future:

- Promote coordination of locally led initiatives.
- Establish long-term partnerships.
- Local actors should be involved throughout the project development.
- Empower local communities, not just local organizations.
- Establish community partnerships.
- Build the capacity of local actors.
- Promote the Settlements Approach.
- Ensure the dignity of local actors.
- Use the strong presence of international organizations for advocacy with the government.
- Develop a system for local partners to evaluate donors.
- Support local organizations to document their work and share it with peers.

ABBREVIATIONS

ARDD   Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund

BDRCS   Bangladesh Red Crescent Society

BRAC   Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee

CBO   Community-based organizations

CDMP   Comprehensive Disaster Management Program

COAST   Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust

CREAP   Crisis response at Cox's Bazar Bangladesh

CSO   Community Service organization

DRR   Disaster risk reduction

HCTT   Humanitarian Coordination Task Team

HBRI   Housing and Building Research Institute

INGO   International non-government organizations

IOM   International Organization for Migration

ISCG   Inter-Sector Coordination Group

KII   Key informant interview

LNGO   Local non-government organization

MTS   Mid-term shelter

NAHAB   The National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh

NAWG   Needs Assessment Working Group

NDMC   National Disaster Management Council

NGO   Non-governmental organizations

NNGO   National non-government organization

RCRC   Red Cross movement

UNHCR   United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNDP   United Nations Development Programme

NIRAPAD   Network for Information, Response, and Preparedness Activities on Disaster

1. INTRODUCTION

A prevalent idea in humanitarian action is localization. However, how localization is operationalized and accomplished in humanitarian contexts still needs to be defined. This is despite increased attention through the Grand Bargain commitments made at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2016 and recent efforts of the Grand Bargain 2.0 process. Although localization in humanitarian action has received much attention, we need to learn more about localization in the Shelter and Settlements Sector and what it includes.

Despite being vulnerable to natural hazards (flooding, landslides, etc.) and climate-induced disasters, Bangladesh has developed a reputation as a model for disaster management over the past years. Strong evidence suggests that preparedness and partnerships are vital in supporting a localized response in Bangladesh (Barbelet, 2019; UNHCR and UNDP, 2019; HAG and NIRAPAD, 2020). Establishing localized working groups with the Humanitarian Coordination Task Team has led to the development of a work plan and vision to strengthen localization in broader disaster response efforts (HAG and NIRAPAD, 2020).

This research examines how various stakeholders in the Shelter and Settlements Sector perceive and conceptualize localization in Bangladesh. It also explores the degree of localization and its effectiveness with international coordination and directions. While examining this, the researchers compared several shelter and settlement responses (plan, policy, and execution) in Bangladesh, focusing on the last 20 years (2003-2023). These responses were delivered by local, national, and international actors, sometimes exclusively, but in most cases, in collaboration. Through examples of locally led shelter and settlement responses, this research hopes to reveal the circumstances or methods that made the responses possible and the tensions or conflicts that various actors had to resolve.

This research focuses on shelter and settlement responses to cyclones and floods since the loss of housing in low-income communities is devastating during these two hazards. Along with these two, the research will also critically analyze the Rohingya response in Bangladesh. The Rohingya response is a unique case to understand, not only for the Bangladesh context but for global humanitarian actors. In 2017, the forcibly displaced community of nearly 1 million Rohingya was housed in the southern part of Bangladesh, which is also very prone to cyclones and floods (Nizet, 2023). Closely examining the Rohingya response case will show an amalgamation of local action, international coordination, and bold national influences in guiding this complex response.

To address the objective of understanding localization, this study used a qualitative research method. Secondary resources were reviewed on paper, and primary research was conducted through interviews with humanitarian actors using a semi-structured format. One focus group and 13 individual interviewees represented international NGOs, national NGOs, local NGOs, government authorities, coordination bodies, researchers, and consultants.

Further details of the methodology are available in Annex A.

2. CONTEXT OVERVIEW

Annex B contains a detailed overview of the country's context and localization efforts. This section contains extracts from that Annex.

2.1 Bangladesh experiences many disasters

Bangladesh is prone to annual floods, frequent storms, and cyclones as well as fires that frequently destroy hundreds of homes in densely populated, low-income urban areas. The coordination between the government, NGOs, and community-based organizations (CBOs) is highly effective, as part of the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme. The National Disaster Management Council is one of Bangladesh's extensive coordination networks, including line ministries, donor partners, and more than 2000 district-, upazila- and union-level disaster committees. Bangladesh's community volunteering approaches, efficient early warning systems, comprehensive legal and institutional framework, thriving NGO sector, community-based decision-making system, significant donor backing, and strong government commitment make Bangladesh a "role model" in disaster management. Within this context, this report explores how localized efforts in shelter and settlement responses during cyclones and floods across Bangladesh and for the Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar.

2.2 Shelter and settlement responses must adapt over time

Shelter response for floods and cyclones

It is a prevailing international consensus that "sheltering is a process." Sheltering is not about giving a "product," such as a completed house, but rather about assisting the impacted communities' process of recovering their shelter, whether the end product is only construction or not. In Bangladesh, shelter response is limited to the relief and early recovery phases. For shelter relief, organizations provide different types of emergency shelter kits and non-food items, including tents, kitchen utensils, tarpaulin, bamboo/wood, corrugated iron sheets, and shelter toolkits. Along with the kit, sometimes training is also provided to the community to maximize the use of the emergency kit items. During recovery, the shelter responses depend on the type of hazard the region faces. For instance, raised plinths are constructed for flood-affected regions, while roof bracing protects against wind storms. The Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI) regularly works with any organization that seeks technical assistance and innovation in shelter response.

Shelter response for Rohingyas in Cox's Bazar

Initially, in 2017, the Bangladeshi host communities provided sticks, branches, bamboo, and trees for the forcibly displaced Rohingyas arriving in Cox's Bazaar. In the first phase, INGOs provided emergency shelter kits and non-food items, including tarpaulin and ropes. In the second phase, they provided upgraded shelter kits, including materials for tying the shelter down and making it durable. The main challenge was topography and inadequate land area, with little area available for the typical household to expand. This shelter response was intended to give beneficiaries shelters that last longer than temporary and emergency shelters. In 2023, transitional shelter assistance is being provided that consists of treated bamboo and angle footings.

The Shelter and Settlements Sector at the Rohingya camp is now working to find options for fire resistance within the government's strict regulation of material use. Permitted materials (tarpaulins and bamboo) are flammable. A corrugated galvanized iron sheet is neither permitted nor appropriate in the windy region of Cox's Bazar. Ongoing research to introduce tiles, alternative light bricks, and painted steel (using fire-resistant paint) aims to reduce fire damage. The use of such new materials relies on the Shelter Cluster negotiating with the government to reduce current restrictions on building materials. From the Rohingya's perspective, the real struggle is the lack of space and permission for vertical expansion. Many households have made adjustments to their initiative without any external aid or international response. Their initiatives must be recognized.

3. FINDINGS

3.1 Overview of locally-led response initiatives in Bangladesh

There's no agreement yet on who's 'local'

The humanitarian and development sector in Bangladesh has started to use the term "localization" recently. However, according to many of the key informant interviews (KIIs), the locally led responses have been happening here for a very long time. Most of the shelter responses can be described as "locally adapted." The local actors can be first responders and to identify contextual needs and reach households with the greatest risk, according to a coalition of national humanitarian actors. Local actors take the lead in responding, with remote organizations (those outside the district) acting as support actors.

The notion of being "local" can vary from individual to organization. Generally, the local people who are the first responders are considered local actors, and the national organizations that have local branches and work with locally recruited staff are also considered local actors. Even after being first responders, the local organizations frequently serve as subcontractors to international organizations, such as UN agencies and international NGOs. Those international organizations are frequently the recipients of funding for humanitarian purposes from other international donors within the framework of the international humanitarian architecture. Data reveals that local and national humanitarian actors only get a small share of international humanitarian assistance directly from donors (2% in 2016) (Oxfam, 2018).

However, local people will always be the first responders. A response being implemented by local people is just the beginning. True localization would mean that they are not only an implementer, but that others follow their **local leadership.**

> "Everyone does not yet agree upon the definition (of localization). Some consider involving the local community as localization, some think it involves local organizations, and some consider adapting local techniques and materials. For me, it is very simple; implementation is already done mainly by the locals, but the challenge has been promoting local leadership and building capacity so that the local organizations can replace the international ones going forward." (*B8, male, international NGO, July 2023*)

To promote local leadership, a gradual shift of responsibility and power is necessary. At the beginning of the Rohingya response, only a few INGOs could provide their knowledge and expertise because of limited familiarization with the cause. With time, they worked with local actors, and now gradually local actors are taking more of a leading role with their newly built capacity and expertise as the INGOs are phasing out their emergency operations.

Empowering local communities is fundamental to locally led responses

Community engagement is another critical strategy for localizing a response. However, to be a local organization does not necessarily mean that all their activities engage the community in the true sense; sometimes, it can be a "checklist-maintenance" exercise. Local organizations might understand the "micro-culture" and practices of the demography they are assisting, given that the organizational lead and human resources are from the same locality. However, they might be unaware of the empowering process. So, the assumption that "local organizations action is localized action" is valid only when local organizations partner with local communities.

> "Localization is all the decisions made closer to the community. So, it is when all the key stakeholders, such as the community, the local partners, and the government are engaged at the local level to make key decisions. Because they understand the community, they understand the local resource availability and the culture. So, localization, to me, is linked in terms of empowerment, giving them the space to make decisions, and to adequately build the capacity so that they can sustain and self-recover."
> (B4, male, international NGO, June 2023)

Some organizations engage communities more actively than others

Different types of organizations, such as local and national NGOs, and local contractors for construction and construction companies, have been working to build shelters in the Rohingya response. According to KII participants, organizations that have prior experience in the field of shelter construction in emergencies and have their funding mechanisms and organizational structures in place are more empowered as opposed to the organizations that lack these. Such organizations have technical, administrative, and community engagement processes, and proper organizational structure to implement in this complex response. They are sensitive about engaging the community, even without the requirement of a project. There are some other organizations who belong to the private sector and do not have prior experience of working in humanitarian sector.

> "Some of them (organizations) were construction companies or contractors. Although they have technical expertise within their team, but, a lot of the time, they are not used to the process of engaging people. For example, to select the beneficiaries to whom to give houses. There is a process for it based on criteria, or the communication (with community). International organizations at least ensure to talk to the community according to standardized procedures." (B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023)

The projects (Shelter/WASH/Site development) are implemented through contractors/sub-contractors in the field who lack an understanding of the humanitarian coordination mechanisms and have limited expertise in community engagement. Sometimes this gap has led to inadequate communication and conflicts with the community.

> "Most of the local organizations act as subcontractors for NGO constructions. Maybe they are contracted for building 10 houses, and that is it for them. If they get into a conflict during building these houses, they often lack the knowledge about how to handle these situations. Sometimes these people working in the field try to achieve the work by threatening the community." (B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023)

The above participant mentioned that with time, expertise in humanitarian response has grown and so has the sense for communicating with the community.

In Cox's Bazar, the local government has enforced shelter guidelines and regulations: a housing unit could be of 10'X15' (150 square feet) for a family of four members and could use only limited shelter materials. The community tends to modify shelter by expanding the shelter, building internal bathing corner and cementing the floor. As per FGDs with Rohingya community participants, the lack of space in the camps and increased risk of landslides and floods meant that the expansion of shelters was not appreciated by the local government authorities.

> "When I came here, our family had six members, now we are eight. Being in a single room with all the members is very difficult. It would be good for us to build even a sleeping deck upwards. I plan to build the sleeping deck. I have been collecting bamboo one by one, but will the camp supervisors allow it? I doubt. I would also like to make a "pucca" floor [with brick and cement], but there is no permission for that." (FGD participant 1, Male, Cox's Bazar, August 2023)

> **"Our family is big with 11 people since I have recently got married (expecting a child). I registered my family separately so that I could get a separate shelter. However, before marriage, our house was burnt during the fire. We could not wait for the support to come. We had to buy a lot of materials from the market [unauthorized/informal markets, where emergency support materials are also sold]. Also, in a crisis like this, you get only some of the materials from the support organizations. Let us say you will need 30 bamboos; you will always receive less than that."** (*FGD participant 2, Male, Cox's Bazar, August 2023*)

3.2 Bangladesh offers good examples of locally led responses

Responses across the KII participants in this study agreed that there are several examples of locally led responses across Bangladesh. Some lessons from locally led shelter responses are to:

Include local actors at the national level

In Bangladesh, disaster management committees develop plans for prevention, mitigation, preparedness, response, and relief measures (see Annex B). According to KIIs, it is one of the key strategies from the government for cost reductions, place-based solutions, and community participation that encompasses shelter projects within any disaster response programs.

National networks like the Shelter Cluster incorporate all local NGOs and relevant actors through data profiling and arranging monthly meetings.

> **"After every shelter response, we communicate with local NGOs to document their shelter response, though sometimes, we cannot reach a few NGOs, who may have responded for the first time. Coordination bodies like NAWG (Needs Assessment Working Group) ensure participation from the local NGOs and include divisional and district-level representatives. That is why, during any disaster forecast, focus questionnaires (for shelter, WASH Clusters, etc.) for needs assessment of the communities are coordinated, and the information reflects the ground realities."** (*B10, male, RCRC, July 2023*)

Access and communication with the communities

All the KII participants emphasized that local actors had the capacity to physically access and communicate with communities in remote areas during disasters, that despite harsh weather conditions they can support the most vulnerable populations. One of emergency response's most significant challenges is reaching remote localities when the infrastructure is destroyed after a disaster. As local and national actors are more aware of local settings, they can ensure access to such communities. A local NGO participant who coordinated shelter response in Sylhet in 2022 reported,

> **"Staff from a local NGO or any other civil organization have the advantage of communicating with the affected people in their language and dialect, which might be difficult for even (national) NGOs with staff from the other parts of the country. It helps the supporting agencies (UN or international NGOs) to be well informed about the affected peoples' needs and required support."**
> (*B7, male, national NGO, July 2023*)

A similar understanding came from the representative of another local NGO, who has several years of experience in shelter response. They indicated the local community's comfort with local NGO staff.

> **"Local organizations have access and are capable of reaching remote areas even during disasters. The affected local people usually feel shy and do not open up to foreigners from international organizations. But the local organization staff can easily mix with the people."** *(B11, male, local NGO, July 2023)*

A KII participant who develops communication material for the Rohingya response, emphasized designing response-related training with the people.

> **"Communication is vital during the response and before any disaster; it can be considered another aid. For example, preparing communication materials in local dialects and languages has been a critical strategy for shelter response in the Rohingya crisis. We get more confidence in our training material when we design it with the people and the results are well connected to the community."**
> *(B8, male, international NGO, July 2023)*

Improvise and be flexible during times of uncertainty

Often local actors are also from the impacted area; are familiar with the transportation routes. They are in contact with the affected communities and are perceptive of community's needs and dynamics which help in solving challenges faced by the communities. Despite being first-time shelter responders in the region, the support team of a national NGO navigated through the challenges and delivered shelter support to the most affected families in Sylhet in 2022.

> **"After the flash flood in October-November 2022, one of the unions, Isar Kolosh (Companigonj, Sylhet) became too difficult to reach. First, we tried loading the response items in a boat but couldn't fit all 550 bags. So, we had to bring the rest of the bags through another route with a truck and boat. We had to shift our planned distribution point, keeping the distance and cost in mind for the affected families to reach the distribution point. This kind of improvisation can only be managed within budget by the local actors."** *(B7, male, national NGO, July 2023)*

Design cost sensitive and cost–effective shelters by communities

In comparison to international actors, local and national organizations have less expensive workforces. All local NGO KII participants mentioned that local NGOs operate cost-effectively, reaching maximum beneficiaries in a short time. Shelter responses often include bulk distribution of tarpaulins, wood or bamboo in remote locations. Local NGOs can locally procure quality materials at lower prices and find ingenious ways to reach this support to the communities. For example, instead of going door to door, they establish a common meeting point from where transportation is easier for all, choosing means of transportation which is cost-effective. Often, the community members provide labor to construct the shelter, or local leaders help to arrange laborers who live nearby in order to reduce costs of construction.

In 2007, after Cyclone Sidr, BRAC, a Bangladesh-based international NGO was planning to distribute shelter materials to the affected communities. Their internal research team proposed a participatory process for designing the shelter kit. After several consultations, they formed a building component (concrete post) production system consisting of staff from central and local offices. Local people also started producing these posts. Thus, the staff (engineers and others) and local communities built 1,300 houses in 6 months.

> **"I think the success was achieved because of people's participation; people gave insights and wisdom, which helped to reduce the cost."** *(B3, male, academia, June 2023)*

Understand "micro-culture," practices and people's aspirations

Local actors are best equipped to respond to humanitarian emergencies, with a good knowledge of the cultural context, trust by the communities, and better awareness of peoples' needs. There are certain rituals or cultural norms of building a place for living regarding its material, orientation and layout, which vary among regions, religions and ethnicities. Emergency shelters have minimal scope for alterations, but still, it is possible to build shelters respecting the affected populations' aspirations. An outsider would not be aware of such 'micro-culture' in practice. Hence the presence of local actors makes it possible to address such practices during shelter response.

A local NGO KII participant described a situation in which an international NGO, without consultation with local actors, designed a shelter package which included four large bamboos for 7,000 people and committed this to the donors. The local NGO, whose policy was to deliver shelter materials to sites where it was needed, had never dealt with such large amounts of bamboo. Navigating muddy roads in the rainy season was difficult; big trucks could not access the areas and the bamboo did not fit in smaller trucks. After much hassle, they were able to deliver the bamboo to several locations. However, the selected members — mostly old, widowed, single women — walked around two kilometers to the spots, but carrying the bamboo to their houses was impossible. Many sold that bamboo to the vendor.

> **"Usually, people do not use bamboo for house construction in the southern region but rather use 'khuti' (wooden poles). So, this package design did not include local people, their demands and overall context consideration. As we were implementers of the project, we tried our best, but the output was zero. If the project was designed with our local knowledge, consulting local people and their demands, the results could have been better. Maybe we could give four khuti or two khuti or maybe just the monetary value of those materials so that they could buy the khuti or (use wood from local) trees. Only the community members can tell us which option is convenient."** (*B9, male, local NGO, July 2023*)

International NGOs working in different regions of Bangladesh are aware of the importance of collaboration with local partners in remote areas for proper understanding so that the local culture is respected.

> **"In specific areas like the Chittagong Hill Tracts, we need to understand the culture, the dialects, the traditional aspects. So we should collaborate or partner with organizations to understand the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the ethnic communities there."** (*B4, male, international NGO, June 2023*)

Recognize indigenous knowledge of local construction techniques and materials

Incorporating local communities' indigenous knowledge into the Shelter and Settlements Sector enhances localization. If locally unavailable material is used, it will not serve the purpose in the long run. One of the strengths of the local people is that they are usually skilled in local construction techniques or know the right people with specific skills, are well aware of materials in the market and surrounding areas, know with whom to negotiate, and are also familiar with local construction processes.

> **"In 2012-13, Khulna and Shyamnagar areas saw a water level rise after a heavy rainy season. Many organizations were providing shelter response. One of the prescribed solutions was to elevate the plinth level of houses. We saw that the plinth-raising technique that was suggested was not the best solution; the plinth still could get eroded. A few organizations and a few international experts got together to find a solution for it. After a survey, the best solution was found from year-old practices of that region: mixing cow dung and straw with soil while compacting the plinth. I believe this solution is one of the best examples of 'locally led adaptation' undertaken by the communities, years before we have started to use the term."** (*B6, male, national NGO, June 2023*)

As a national consultant, with experience of working in various disaster-affected areas, an architect and researcher talked about the importance of local techniques and horizontal sharing.:

> **"We have seen solutions available within the communities, within the vernacular practices and at different geographical locations. For example, in north Bangladesh, people use cross bracing in their houses, which would also be very useful for southern Bangladesh, where people may not know about the particular technique. So, we arranged horizontal sharing through the action research so that people of different regions can learn from each other's house-strengthening techniques."**
> (*B3, male, academia, June 2023*)

In the Rohingya response, incorporating community knowledge differs from the rest of the Bangladesh context, because of the government restrictions about material use and engaging the community. However, there are some excellent examples of using community knowledge and action to prevent bigger disasters, such as applying indigenous knowledge for disaster prevention.

> **"The camp is spread over 5,000 acres of land, which was a reserve forest and hilly area. All the trees have been uprooted; all the hills have been cleared during the settlement process. Such a change in the landscape made every actor concerned about the monsoon seasons; no one knew how the region would react to the monsoon. Only local people knew. So, they started locally led initiatives like planting the grass on the slope side for slope protection, cascading or controlling the water run, or a particular way of preparing the land for shelters, etc. It might be too soon to conclude the impact of local techniques; however, the camps did not observe any major landslides, except for a few minor ones until now, which had been the biggest concern since the beginning (since 2017)."** (*B2, male, UN/IO, June 2023*)

Selecting appropriate local material is crucial for shelter, especially in the Rohingya shelter response, due to the restrictions. The shelter actors are continuously looking for ways to make the shelter more resilient and engage the community in the process, sometimes within the restrictions, sometimes by negotiating with government representatives.

> **"If we introduce some material which is not locally available it will not eventually work for long. Also, it should be kept in mind that the materials can be such that they cannot be taken out from the shelter and repurposed. Even if they are repurposed, they should be somehow used for shelter. The set of materials should be designed considering the local supplies."** (*B2, male, UN/IO, June 2023*)

3.3 Some gaps and barriers to local leadership still exist

Although humanitarian organizations have been modifying their approach, collaborating with, and learning from various shelter actors after a disaster, conflict or displacement, substantial challenges and gaps for achieving local leadership persist. This study identified some gaps and barriers, mainly during the KIIs, where the participants shared their perspectives and ground realities of the shelter responses.

There is a lack of shelter-specific expertise for large scale response

Bangladesh's success in disaster management emerged as local or national NGOs coordinated with government and NGO-level coordination bodies. There is limited focus on shelter and settlement responses in Bangladesh.

> **"Our expertise is based on [disaster risk reduction]; unfortunately, there is not much regular practice for shelter response."** (*B2, male, UN/IO, June 2023*)

Oftentimes organizations with limited shelter experience end up providing shelter response as per the community's needs post disaster in conjunction with livelihood or nutrition projects. Then, after a hazard as

people's primary need becomes a shelter, the organizations try to source funds to support the local population. This is how one national respondent organization came into shelter response in 2022 after the Sylhet flash flood. The upazila coordinator of the national NGO said they had been working with nutrition before the Sylhet flash flood. During the response, they were mainly responsible for selecting the most vulnerable families and distributing the shelter kit that had already been designed by the donors: Korean government's fund through an INGO.

In these efforts, there is enough intention to support, but there may be minimal previous experience. Thus, many organizations have only been involved in one shelter response and mainly with emergency kit distribution. Ensuring that all institutions necessary for shelter response have the skills to carry out the functions properly is crucial. There is scope to improve the institutional capacity of local actors directly related to the technical part of shelter response.

This emerged even for the Rohingya response.

> **"In this context, one of my observations is that our local organizations have not worked in the emergency humanitarian response of this scale [with a mass displacement population] before."**
> (B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023)

In 2017, with the influx of Rohingya refugees, many local and national NGOs with vast experience in DRR but limited shelter experience worked with international NGOs. Recalling the experience of early Rohingya responses, a KII participant mentioned that the response time to house nearly a million people is so short that every extending hand (experienced or not) was necessary. Now, local and national NGOs have gathered experience in shelter and settlement in the following six years. They mentioned that sometimes, local contractors or construction companies played the role of shelter builders, who are now shelter actors. These actors have limited experience in prioritizing beneficiaries, setting relevant selection criteria and community engagement because of their contract type (subcontract) or other expertise (construction).

> **"To some extent, [some of the shelter actors in the Rohingya response] have some technical expertise within their team. Nevertheless, a lot of the time, they are not used to the process."**
> (B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023)

There is a lack of coordinated shareable information

There are various aspects of coordination in shelter response: sharing information, using resources cooperatively, creating shared guidelines and defining roles for coordinating agencies. There is currently no comprehensive list or profile identifying each shelter actor in the nation that might ensure effective coordination. Shelter Cluster Bangladesh has been actively coordinating with the government, international agencies, and national and local actors in recent years. Nevertheless, many organizations are not part of this regular coordination and fall outside of these communication channels. In many cases, those actors who responded during a crisis are not shelter-focused organizations or groups. These factors make it challenging to identify all the local shelter actors and document their shelter initiatives and understand their experiences and capacities.

> **"Everyone wants coordination, but no one wants to be coordinated."** (B2, male, UN/IO, June 2023)

A local NGO representative brought up another issue of the government's cooperation with local NGOs. Often, the responses from the government officials are not timely. It results in difficulties in implementing the proposed program, timeline management and coordination with other actors. In most cases, supporting international NGOs refuse to understand the real challenges of dealing with individuals in formal power/organizational structures.

> **"Say, if there is a project which would require us to coordinate with the local government officials, it might become very difficult to implement that project in reality if the government employees are not available or cooperative during the project time period. [International] NGOs do not have a proper idea about the lack of such coordination between local NGOs and local governments."**
> (*B9, male, local NGO, July 2023*)

There is vast information available on shelter responses in the Rohingya crisis, mainly because it was coordinated through the Shelter and Settlements Sector there. However, the overall country context lacks data compared to the Rohingya response.

Few policies facilitate local leadership

Bangladesh has developed policies for disaster management, with well-established guidelines and frameworks to develop and follow up on DRR activities. A KII participant emphasized that it is possible to ensure localization, similar to DRR advancement, in the Shelter and Settlements Sector through policy.

> **"If we make shelter a true national agenda from all perspectives, it is possible to scale up localization practices at the community and national levels."** (*B3, male, academia, June 2023*)

There are some guidelines for rural housing/shelter response. However, the literature study and primary research indicate a lack of policies and action plans for shelter and settlement response and localization in this sector. The government typically steps in, helps with housing and shelter-related projects, and fosters supportive environments. However, "localization" is not formally ensured through any policy, so such practices do not get scaled up:

> **"The government usually intervenes or facilitates shelter-related works and creates an enabling environment. Like, our institution facilitates contributions on policies and technological support, but we cannot implement on a larger scale without appropriate policy."** (*B1, male, Government, June 2023*)

A similar thought was expressed at the coordination level.

> **"It would accelerate the [localization] agenda if it is included in the policy for responses."**
> (*B10, male, RCRC, July 2023*)

Some organizations take an individualistic approach

A general tendency with the national organizations with capacity and experience in shelter response is that if there are resources (monetary or technical), all individuals can develop various shelter designs, programs and options. For example, a standard guideline for shelter packages from the Shelter Cluster exists. However, small local organizations often prefer to make their packages depending on budget and availability of materials. Can it be good practice since many different technical models and mechanisms are being generated? Rather than getting into the debate of good or not, it can safely be said that this organizational individualism stops the models from reaching "scaled up" level. The interviews showed that organizations would have no reservations in sharing their innovation for other organizations to implement.

> **"In many cases, we see every NGOs working and piloting independently. Maybe one better design has been developed somewhere by one NGO. The other NGOs can use a similar design and progress the work differently. There is no need to devise a solution for the same problem experimentally. If the internal coordination is increased, the shelter response work will get scaled up automatically."**
> (*B6, male, national NGO, June 2023*)

Crowdfunding shelter initiatives is challenging

Several shelter initiatives to support affected communities are crowdfunded, non-coordinated and non-institutional. During the first few days of any disaster, people from all over the country are more compassionate and contribute to these crowdfunds. However, these crowdfunded responses are often administered by people with limited or no understanding of community needs. According to one international level respondent, the items provided by crowdfunding might not be helpful for the affected community, but in such situations, people tend to accept any aid that is accessible right away. Unfortunately, that might make them ineligible to receive other humanitarian support when it becomes available, as humanitarian actors apply a needs-based approach. Non-coordinated support also misses the most remote areas, as reaching places with large amounts of goods is challenging. During a disaster, a lack of cooperation severely depletes resources.

> **"Due to non-coordinated support, remote areas do not get support at times, as it is challenging to reach those places with large amounts of goods. So, several organizations might go to the same region within reach, while other regions are missed completely."** (*B10, male, RCRC, July 2023*)

Local actors' participation in project design is limited

Despite the international humanitarian community committing to a localization agenda, sometimes, it is hard for the donors to comprehend field assessments and to acknowledge their local partners' inputs. This results in limiting the power of local actors in designing programs, allocating budgets and monitoring the projects. It is evident from the interviews that local actors feel they could contribute more to the project if they had been part of it from the initial phase.

> **"We could change the modality of the programs as required if we had the decision-making power and take quick decisions. Also, we would feel more ownership to such projects."** (*B9, male, local NGO, July 2023*)

The participation of local partners in the implementation phase has shown to enhance technical and organizational skills and capacities. Similarly, the participation of local partners and communities in project design phase could help both international and national actors through reciprocal knowledge sharing. A KII informant who is part of the Rohingya response said,

> **"Many times, it feels that had the local organizations been involved from an earlier stage, they would be able to bring some information from the community beforehand."** (*B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023*)

Local actors have limited access to financial management

Small local NGOs mainly depend on donor funds, as it is challenging to generate funding otherwise, as they cannot take bank loans in most cases. The literature review and KIIs suggest that local NGOs do not get paid enough overhead costs for management during their project. Most projects include minimal managerial costs and limited or almost no emergency or additional funding scope. Local actors know their context's market prices and the systems and relevant costs. Without giving them the power to manage finances, any proposed plan may suffer while implemented.

> **"In some cases, [international] NGOs allocate an unreasonable budget for shelter packages as they are not experts in that field or aware of the local context."** (*B9, male, local NGO, July 2023*)

Moreover, local NGOs are usually unaware of the overall project budget, as it is not discussed with them. Under subcontracting arrangements, funds are transferred by the international NGOs to the local NGOs. The local NGOs only get hired and paid for specific implementation parts; they are not paid enough for their development and

institutional capacity building. Furthermore, when a project is designed without their input, they do not have the flexibility to change in response to field requirements, which is very much needed for each context.

> **"As local organizations, there are some gaps and lack in our ability to utilize the funds properly. The gap will always remain there if we do not achieve the knowledge and expertise."** (B11, male, local NGO, July 2023)

While the local NGOs can efficiently manage resources in the field, they face constraints in managing their institutional resources and an administrative system due to limited financial support. Local agencies are led and operate under hierarchical leadership. Usually, an executive director who is also the founder of the organization is involved in financing, project development, budget management, and monitoring. The participant mentioned that limited finance and limited staffing affect the handover of roles within a small organization, hampering shelter responses.

> **"There is no standard handover process when someone leaves the job. Usually, it is handed over to the head of the agency. Moreover, [the head of the agency] is often too busy to shift it properly to a recruit. [International] NGOs have a proper handover process so that they can avoid such difficulties. Local agencies need to work on their institutional capacity to overcome these issues of role division, HR capacity, financial management, rules for implementation, etc."** (B12, male, Bangladesh INGO, July 2023)

Local actors are paid less than other actors

Local NGOs experience a disparity in salary for the local organization employees, and there is a lack of transparency for the whole project budget. The quality of work varies with the field officer and their salary range. If someone with a higher salary could be appointed, the job would be done more responsibly and efficiently. Many resources are used for the international staff's field visits, and compared to that, the local actors need more facilities for day-to-day activities. Usually, the overall project budget is kept from them, as they are mostly hired to implement a project. They are only aware of that part and have a minimal idea about the project or various actors' finance allocation.

> **"People experience a lack of transparency and a disparity in salary for the local organization employees. [International] NGOs allocate high-range salaries for their staff, including his/her visits, transportation, etc. In some cases, such a travel cost is higher than the salary of a few local employees."**
> (B9, male, INGO, July 2023)

Low pay or market competition for skilled people also results in the loss of trained staff in smaller organizations. One respondent mentioned,

> **"Another problem is that people usually do not work long-term in local agencies. When someone is given training to strengthen [their] capacity, often the same person is not working in the same sector after a few months. Such incidents are widespread in local agencies due to a lack of facilities, job dissatisfaction, overburdening work, salary dissatisfaction, etc."** (B12, male, Bangladesh INGO, July 2023)

Few local actors interpret and meet donor requirements without support

There are certain compliances and processes to mobilize funds from donor agencies. Many times, local NGOs struggle to follow these. In Bangladesh, as English is not the first language, it poses a barrier to preparing project proposals for local NGO staff. Some gaps in competencies and communication (in English) create distances and keep the power dynamics at the donor's end, resulting in distrust issues. Few international NGOs provide training to local NGOs for financial and operations management so that they can apply for direct funding with the donors.

> **"Globally, there is so much happening in the humanitarian sector. A local organization needs a partner like an [International] NGO who is connected at the global level, helping them to understand the donor trends and the new tools, research, and findings for evidence building that they need to adapt. Moreover, I think organizations like ours help them directly or strengthen them to meet some of the donors' expectations. Because it is a constantly evolving area."** (*B4, male, INGO, June 2023*)

The Settlement Approach is not widely practiced

Disasters not only affect individual shelters; all types of communal infrastructure also get disrupted, affecting the whole settlement. During a disaster, inadequate infrastructure worsens the community's living conditions and health care. In complex contexts, shelters are more than a technical product, other factors such as social cohesion, alignment with the government's vision, and provision of basic services such as WASH facilities, drainage, and other communal facilities are necessary. In Bangladesh, the shelter response is scattered, and there are not many approaches from the settlement perspective, as it requires more extensive interventions and coordination with the local government and other actors.

> **"It is necessary to look at shelter implementation from the settlement planning perspective, not only as number of shelters. This requires coordinating with other relevant actors and mainstream the settlement approach and address other crosscutting issues like safety and access for persons with disability."** (*B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023*)

4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Bangladesh has impressive grassroots development expertise, an extensive network of local NGOs, and most importantly, a well-aware population who have learned to respond through previous disaster experiences. The country is well supported by technical knowledge from national and international institutions renowned architects and trained engineers who contribute to this sector. Nevertheless, the contribution of the local actors in terms of their local techniques and wisdom is always more effective on the ground, especially in emergencies.

In the humanitarian sector, to improve the quality of the shelter and settlement response, the government, regional, international NGOs, and local actors need to work in a coordinated way. To obtain the best possible strategic and timely responses there is no other alternative to locally-led responses. Cross-learning among communities, local governments, as well as the experts involved in developing shelter solutions, when done inclusively, ensures that the response and recovery measures strengthen self-determination. Better systems to deal with, recover from, and bounce back from disasters can be developed by putting local actors at the center of the decision-making process. The following recommendations will help to promote localization and to foster local leadership in the shelter sector in Bangladesh:

Promote coordination of locally-led initiatives

All relevant actors, including the community, local government, national government, and donor agencies, must complement their respective roles and duties to respect, protect and fulfill human rights in times of emergency. In Bangladesh, many do not know who the shelter actors and experts are to go to in emergencies, as overlapping agencies work in shelters and other sectors. For the balanced distribution of shelter packages, it is imperative to work in a coordinated way during the response. The coordination body, Shelter Cluster, has been working in that direction. In August 2023, at the Shelter Clusters' monthly meeting, local shelter actors suggested that more subclusters could be introduced for region-based coordination. The Rohingya response in Bangladesh showed that international organizations have had immense experience in coordinated response, which is now transferred to the local NGOs.

Establish long-term partnerships

Several shelter experts suggested that international NGOs should focus on developing and nurturing long-term partnerships with local actors, rather than a project-based approach. It should be planned in a way that strengthens the capacities of local NGOs and enhances their capacities to lead local responses to disasters.

> **"Short-term activities cannot address the gaps properly. Both the international and local actors should have long-term planning for building the capacity."** (B11, male, local NGO, July 2023)

International NGO staff should be the project lead for the first one or two years and then hand over the leadership to local NGO officials. In the long run, as expats leave the response, the decision-making and strategic capabilities of the local experts are nurtured and relied upon to sustain the shelter response. For sharing and transferring these responsibilities, capacity strengthening and inclusive decision-making processes are crucial.

> **"Say, as a shelter partner, BDRCS would build different kinds of shelters over the year in Camp-9, in coordination with the government, and of course, with the organization they had partnered with, like IOM or UNHCR. When we look at the impact of such a partnership on an organization over a year, we see that by continuously complying with many things, the organization grows. However, if the same things are said in a three-day workshop, they learn about it but do not deal with it the same way. Moreover, there is another kind of modality, which is not a longer partnership but a partnership for a single project within a limited time. It is less effective than a long partnership."** (B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023)

Local actors should be involved throughout the project development

The international agencies should be responsible for finding the right actors and co-developing the project from the initial stage with them. One interviewee suggested that along with asking for project proposals, there may be some study or action research done by the international community before the project is designed to determine what the project should contain. Including anthropologists, sociologists, translators, and other professionals in the response who may aid in comprehending the affected community can help to understand peoples' processes. Indigenous knowledge should be respected, and they should have confidence in local organizations. The project becomes sustainable when local organizations participate in the conceptual stage through implementation alongside international organizations through long-term planning. Representatives of international NGOs also shared that to ensure localization, it is imperative to empower the local organizations and strengthen their capacities.

> **"It is one thing to give the grants directly to the local organizations, but there are other factors, such as partnership and systematic power shifting, which are important to sustain localization."**
> (*B4, male, international NGO, June 2023*)

Empower local communities, not just local organizations

Being a "local organization" does not ensure that the organization empowers the local community. Any partnership between international and local organizations should keep local communities at its heart. Community participation should be more than just another point in the project's checklist. Together, the humanitarian community (local and international) should ensure that. The process should empower communities; it should begin with people, co-design shelter with people, and then leave a running system so that people can keep creating more. Communities are experts in their own right concerning their cultural contexts, local practices, and social dynamics. Rather than being treated as objects of design and professionals being designers, when they are engaged in the decision-making process, the system becomes more sustainable and runs long after all organizations leave. Participatory planning, in the truest sense, is necessary in our context.

> **"Many organizations claim to be working in a participatory way, but they do not believe they can trust people's way, so they design projects to control the power without giving people full freedom. Even if only one shelter is built, it should incorporate people."** (*B3, male, academia, June 2023*)

Establish community partnerships

Partnering with communities is also vital according to the shelter experts and professionals. Investing time, and resources and developing a habit of listening to the communities for organizations to be more rooted locally is crucial. The activities of a shelter project could be planned according to community organizing principles. Since formal organizations cannot officially partner with informal/non-registered community groups (because of their operational systems), a KII participant recommended that the humanitarian community devise new systems to partner with local communities, regardless of their legal registration.

Build the capacity of local actors

> **"Capacity building is an ongoing process; it does not end."** (*B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023*)

Capacity building should focus on developing soft skills for community engagement along with hard skills that are required for shelter construction. Local NGOs can be supported to build inclusive processes for the participation of diverse community members. Deep listening and shifting the power to the community are necessary for participatory planning. Sometimes the presence of outsiders can be a problem, so volunteers from the community

could be trained to conduct sessions. Furthermore, there could be modules for community engagement tools and processes for all local actors.

> **"Aside from technical expertise, capacity building [for local NGOs] in understanding humanitarian context and coordination mechanism, communication, sensibility towards community and community participation skills are required."** (*B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023*)

Local organizations need more training to develop project proposals for direct funding. They need to be aware of the risk mitigation from a donor's perspective.

> **"Some international organizations are arranging various capacity building—sharing and trying to transfer skills to the local organizations so that they can apply [for direct funding] through particular templates where required."** (*B8, male, international NGO, July 2023*)

In Bangladesh, coordination bodies and consortia are usually led by international NGOs. The local NGOs currently lack capacities to lead coordination platforms, create and develop the consortium grant application, manage members for a grant application, and allocate responsibilities across different NGOs. In the future, to become the prime of a consortium, the local organizations need to focus on capacity building for leadership and management.

There has been a positive change in the last few years.

> **"Since the last 10 years, we [are] seeing a different role of the international actors. Before that, we saw the international actors sending a lot of staff from different countries, and a big part of the response budget would go to those experts. Now international actors send [fewer] experts and the expertise of executing a response has been developed by the local/national professionals. It still needs to be increased. The planning of [the] response should increase [towards] more national and local professionals. They ought to design more and more projects/programs. For that, more capacity building of national and local professionals is needed. [There should be] stronger monitoring systems and the commitment to responsibilities by the local actors should be increased."** (*B6, male, national NGO, June 2023*)

Many organizations have built specific institutional capacities in the Shelter and Settlements Sector during the Rohingya response. They should be utilized and nurtured to contribute to any disaster and help local organizations from other regions for efficient shelter response.

Promote Settlements Approach

The settlements approach is almost non-existent in Bangladesh except for a few examples. Interventions for shelter and settlement response need to incorporate various actions at the community level and investigate whether and which measures would be able to lessen the effects of flash floods or other disasters. Developing community-based systems and early communal preparations could be beneficial alongside technical efforts. For example, people tend not to leave domestic animals during disasters. The Bangladesh Rural Advancement Committee (BRAC) anticipated this and built a communal cowshed and shelter for people, which has proved to be an adequate shelter response.

Another example is the embankment development of the "hati" (cluster village) in the "haor" (large wetland ecosystem) areas of Sylhet. Some organizations have strengthened the embankment of the hati as flood management infrastructure. Scaling up such collective shelter responses may be essential for fostering settlement approaches.

Ensure the dignity of local actors

Even during an extreme emergency, affected families, local representatives, and other actors should all be treated with dignity. Respect, interaction, choice, and freedom are all viewed as components of dignity. One strategy could foster community self-sufficiency by giving people control over decision-making and choice. In some cases, cash-based aid was regarded as more dignified, but only when it was given respectfully.

Also, the dignity of local organizations should be taken care of, as it often seems that even if they are termed partners, sometimes they are treated more like employees of other agencies, be they national or international. There should be equitable and stronger partnerships between local actors and international NGOs.

> **"We should try to work with dignity and respect. Partners should have the heartfelt intention to work with people and work with that mindset. There should be a friendship between international and local actors where they enrich each other. Both should be equally responsible for the failure or success."**
> (*B11, male, local NGO, July 2023*)

Use the strong presence of international organizations for advocacy with the government

One participant mentioned that because of international partnerships, the international humanitarian community will have substantially more bargaining power than their local partners. The same interviewee recommended that international NGOs should strategically use their negotiation power to increase their local partners' visibility in advocacy and negotiations with government organizations/agencies.

Develop a system for local partners to evaluate donors

International NGOs hold brainstorming sessions discussing the lessons learned when a project is over. Stakeholder feedback is gathered via sessions during and after project completion. These assessments are usually made internally; it does not come from organizations that implement policies. Many national and local organizations believe it would be beneficial if donor organizations could be evaluated systematically, apart from their internal evaluation. Global funding or standards apply to project modality and design, and they then try to contextualize it. There could be a gap in this process. If such assessments were made at different project stages, it would be easier to understand the discrepancies and gaps.

> **"For the international organizations to function as donors, there are accountability structures and certain procedures, and they do research and knowledge. ISCG, an NGO platform, meets with donors on a regular basis and offers suggestions for improving their financing methods. In the future, this consultation process may be made more transparent, and local groups could receive the reports of these consultations by making them available to the general public."** (*B8, male, international NGO, July 2023*)

Support local organizations to document their work and share it with peers

Small organizations at the local level, like local NGOs and other communal groups, put a lot of effort into their work. However, due to a lack of capacity and technical knowledge, resource constraints, and a lack of qualified personnel, their efforts are not always published widely. The national or international audience is not exposed to so many excellent works. Documentation and publication will not only put the local and national actors on the response map but also share valuable learning with their peer organizations. The assistance in building capacity for documentation should include training of a global standard and the budget to provide the organization with appropriate professionals.

A common platform for sharing stories can be another way to showcase good shelter response examples. If people are better informed, prepared, and able to use actionable information, their dependence on aid will reduce gradually and they will feel more empowered and informed. Hence it is really necessary to document everything and spread the good practices and it is also very vital to reflect on the documented content.

> **"A study was made on the fire incidents of three different scales by Global Shelter. The objective of the case study was not to assess the success but to see what lessons could be taken away from this. While writing it down, reflections on the gaps, timing, [and] strengths were noticed. Documentation always helps to refine the next steps."** (*B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023*)

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6. ANNEXES

Annex A: Methodology

Annex B: Context analysis

Annex C: Stakeholder mapping

ANNEX A: METHODOLOGY

A.1 Approach

This study investigates the concepts and perceptions of localization in Bangladesh across different actors in the humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Sector. This research considered two cases—the overall Bangladesh context and Rohingya responses. A qualitative research approach was selected as the methodology.

The objectives of the research were to:

- Explore how different stakeholders in the humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Sector understand and experience localization.
- Reflect critically on examples of locally led shelter and settlements response and the conditions or processes that enabled them, including tensions or conflicts faced by different actors and how they were navigated.
- Compare the potential outcomes of locally led responses with reported outcomes from locally led responses in various contexts.
- Analyze how these factors differ across contexts and examine the implications of the roles played by different actors.

A.2 Scope

In Bangladesh, a network of government organizations, NGOs and community-based organizations (CBOs) coordinate and carry out the disaster risk reduction work and plan. Government organizations include ministries, task forces, "paurashabhas" (the rural equivalent of a municipality) and wards/unions (the smallest administrative unit of the government). This research will primarily focus on NGO operations and their working relations with CBOs. Investigating government organizations' operation for shelter response is outside the scope, except for as part of the discussion, which will accommodate national policy and structure as supplementary for the whole study.

This study includes international, national and local NGOs and aid agencies. Some lead, finance and connect funds to implementers; others play the role of direct implementers. Many organizations also play multiple roles; for example, Brac is both an implementer and connector of funds to other local NGOs. With a microscopic lens, it can also be seen that direct implementers also use the CBO structure created by themselves or existing in settlements.

Both UNDP and Brac implement responses through CBOs. Others implement through beneficiaries directly. Most of the research will focus on NGOs and some NGO-CBO relationships, as it is vital to understand the power dynamics when it comes to shifting the power to local actors.

A.3 Data sources

This study investigates the concepts and perceptions of localization in Bangladesh across different actors in the humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Sector. This research considered two cases—the overall Bangladesh context and Rohingya response—through:

- A literature review of peer-reviewed journals, news reports, agency reports that have been made public, and websites that feature localization initiatives.
- Preliminary stakeholder mapping, which identified potential participants for primary data collection.
- Semi-structured interviews with 13 individuals representing international, national and local NGOs, government authorities, coordination bodies, researchers and consultants.
- One focus group discussion.

The researchers reviewed 35 reports and journals, related to shelter and settlement responses, the Rohingya response, humanitarian and shelter-related policies in Bangladesh, and localization theories. The challenge or limitation of the literature review is that there is not enough material produced and made public by the local actors (first responders). After a thorough literature review, the researchers have found gaps in available information and knowledge about the impact of localized response and have planned to examine more through primary data collection and analysis. Preliminary stakeholder mapping has been done from this stage and potential participants for primary data collection were identified.

The coordination schema in Table A1 was developed to achieve the objectives.

Table A1: Research plan to achieve four objectives

Objectives	Sections/discussions	Data method and source	Analysis/assessment
Explore how different stakeholders in the humanitarian Shelter and Settlements Sector understand and experience localization	Overview of the country situation Summary of national policies/framework Identification of key actors	Literature review Semi-structured interviews	Mapping stakeholders from literature review Defining "locally led" responses from key informant interviews (KIIs) from the organizations/agencies identified in stakeholder mapping
Critically reflect on examples of locally led shelter and settlements response and the conditions or processes that enabled them, including tensions or conflicts faced by different actors and how they were navigated	Shelter and settlement response	Literature review Semi-structured interviews	Analyzing select cases of locally led shelter and settlements response examples of floods, cyclones and forcefully displaced populations since 2003 Mapping trust, investments on local actors and their responses Mapping barriers Assessing success stories and challenges and their enablers
Compare the potential outcomes of locally led responses with reported outcomes from locally led responses in various contexts	Overview of localized response	Semi-structured interviews Site visit/researcher's observation	Analyzing potential versus reported, aspired versus realized responses through site visits and discussion through interviews
Analyze how these factors differ across contexts and examine the implications of the roles played by different actors	Roles and activities within shelter and settlement	Semi-structured interviews Workshop with local stakeholders	Analyzing project design—implementation principles and practices Formulating suggestions for future enabling environments

Table A1: Research plan

For in-depth understanding, the focus group discussion and KIIs were designed for three categories:

- Local actors.
- National bodies.
- International NGOs.

Thirteen semi-structured interviews and one focus group discussion were conducted, ensuring participants from all categories. Also, participating in one monthly meeting of Bangladesh Shelter Cluster contributed to primary data collection, where various shelter actors shared about their responses. With some overarching questions, focus group discussions and KIIs were managed as flexible conversations. The questions were targeted to learn about the context, challenges and gaps for localization in the Shelter and Settlements Sector. All the interviewees participated voluntarily with informed consent.

Figure A1 illustrates the elements of the research process and Figure A2 shows the organizations represented in the KIIs and focus discussion group.
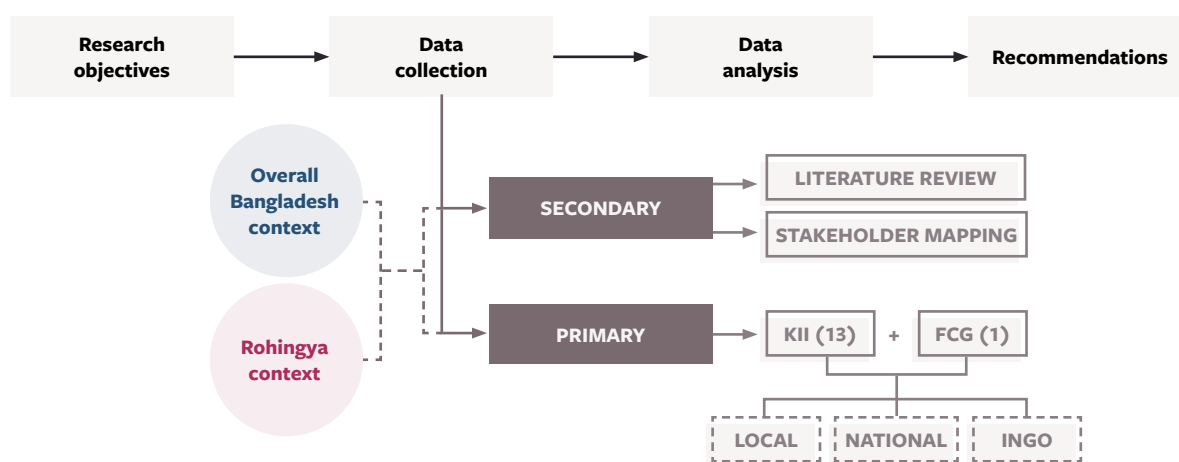
Figure A1: Elements of the research process
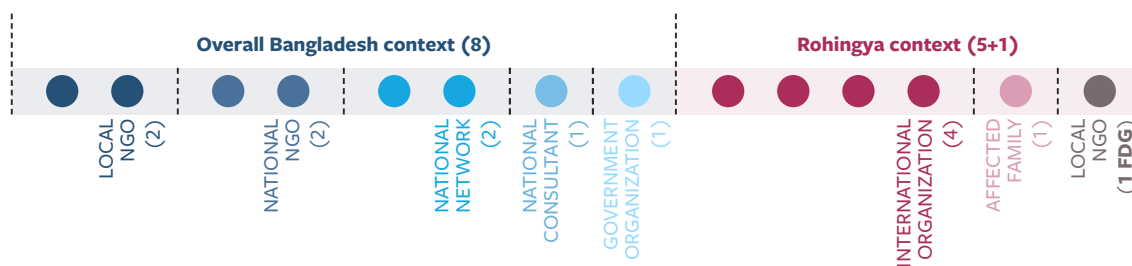
Figure A2: Organizations represented in the KIIs

Apart from the interviews, researchers paid a visit to Cox's Bazar. During the site visit, one focus group discussion with members from a local NGO and one interview with an affected family (Figure A3) from the Rohingya camp were conducted to understand localization from their perspective.

Figure A3: Key informant interview at the Rohingya camp, Coxs Bazar, Bangladesh

Researchers also attended a Shelter Cluster monthly meeting (Figure A4), where various shelter actors presented their work in this sector and discussed options for better coordination structure.

Figure A4: Shelter Cluster monthly meeting at Dhaka

A.4. Summary of KIIs

| Code	Type of organization	Gender of interviewee(s)	Date of interview	Location of interview	Method
B1	Government	Male	05 June, 2023	Dhaka	In-person
B2	UN/IO	Male	06 June, 2023	Dhaka	Remote
B3	Academia	Male	07 June, 2023	Jhenaidah	Remote
B4	INGO	Male	08 June, 2023	Nepal	Remote
B5	UN/IO	Female	17 June, 2023	Kabul	Remote
B6	NNGO	Male	23 June, 2023	Kurigram	Remote
B7	NNGO	Male	04 July, 2023	Sylhet	Remote
B8	INGO	Male	06 July, 2023	CXB	Remote
B9	LNGO	Male	14 July, 2023	USA	Remote
B10	RCRC	Male	17 July, 2023	Dhaka	Remote
B11	LNGO	Male	21 July, 2023	Dhaka	Remote
B12	Bangladesh INGO	Male	23 July, 2023	Dhaka	Remote
B13	LNGO	Male	03 August, 2023	CXB	In-person

Table A2: Summary of KIIs

A.5 KII questions

A. Governmental organization representatives

A1. Please introduce yourself. Which organization do you work with? What role do you play in your own organization?

A2. Can you tell us about your organization's work within shelter and settlement responses in Bangladesh?
   a. Type of work done
   b. Geographical distribution

A3. What is localization in shelter and settlement response in your opinion?
   a. What should "localization" entail?
   b. Who should be involved?
   c. Where would you place your organization in the "localization" spectrum in the shelter sector in Bangladesh?
   d. How is it practiced in Bangladesh?

A4. Does your organization work with local and international actors in this sector (shelter and settlement response)?

    a. Whom do you identify as local actors? What kind of collaboration does your organization do with local actors?

    b. Whom do you identify as international actors? What kind of collaboration does your organization do with international actors?

A5. In your experience, what are the roles of local actors?

    a. What are the roles of international actors?

    b. What kind of tension occurs when all these stakeholders have to work together?

    c. What are the roles of different ministries and local/central govt?

    d. What kind of tension occurs when all these stakeholders have to work together?

A6. What is your opinion on a locally led response in shelter and settlement response? How can the locally led responses improve in effectiveness, relevance and efficiency?

A7. What is needed for local actors' capacity building? (Where do they lack?) What is your suggestion for international actors in this regard (strengthening local actors' capacity)?

A8. How can international actors improve their role and contribution in the local leadership in this sector (shelter and settlement response)?

A9. According to you, what are the main challenges/barriers to increasing the role of local actors as leaders and decision makers in general / within the sheltering response in particular? (Probe: government aspects, resources, any other).

A10. According to you, what are the main enablers/ supporting factors that support local leadership within the shelter response in Bangladesh?

A11. What are the critical lessons learned/recommendations for future localization plans in Bangladesh? (*Probe: What key changes are required, and who needs to make them?*)

B.   Local/national actor representatives

B1. Please introduce yourself. Which organization do you work with? What role do you play in your organization?

B2. Can you tell us about your organization's work within shelter and settlement responses in Bangladesh?

    a. Type of work done

    b. Geographical distribution

B3. What is localization in shelter and settlement response in your opinion?

    a. What should "localization" entail? Who should be involved?

    b. How is it practiced in Bangladesh?

B4. Please provide a few examples of a locally led response in shelter and settlements in Bangladesh.

    a. What were they? What kind of partnership/grant was developed and how?

    b. What worked throughout the process, and why? What were the enabling factors in this partnership/project?

    c. What didn't work? What were the challenges/gaps/tensions in this partnership/project? How did your organization navigate through them?

    d. What are the lessons learned from such projects/experiences?

B5. What are the reasons behind the lack (if any) of locally led projects/partnerships?
   a. What are the key challenges facing locally led initiatives in the sheltering sector?
   b. How in your opinion, should the sheltering sector in Bangladesh address them in the future?

B6. When international organizations work as donors, connectors or/and direct implementers in shelter and settlement response, what role do they play? What changes would you like to see in their role that will foster more local leadership?

B7. What advantage does your organization get when you partner with international organizations for shelter and settlement response?

B8. How do you negotiate (with donors/international organizations) the support you believe the beneficiaries truly need in shelter and settlement response?
   a. How do you negotiate the support your organization needs for capacity building/strengthening in the shelter and settlement response?

B9. Have there been any shelter and settlement response cases when you believed some approach/es to be more effective, but you had to tailor the project according to international actors' demand? Would you like to walk us through such a scenario?

B10. Can you mention a few ways in which international agencies (donors, connectors) can be evaluated and address accountability concerning their role? Do you have any examples/stories of your organization (evaluating or addressing accountability) in program-related and funding decisions?

B11. What kind of program-related decision can you make where international agencies do not control/are flexible/give freedom?
   a. If you can't make these decisions, why not?
   b. What kind of funding-related decision can you make where international agencies do not control/are flexible/give freedom? If you can't make these decisions, why not?

B12. How often do you publish your work, different valuable evidence/ learning through communication materials- reports, video media, critical reflection news, etc.? Is there any limitation in doing so? If yes, what is that?

C. International NGO/UN agency representatives

C1. What role does your organization play in the Shelter and Settlements Sector of the humanitarian response in Bangladesh:
   a. Type of work done
   b. Geographical distribution

C2. What is localization in shelter and settlement response, in your opinion?
   a. What should "localization" entail? Who should be involved?
   b. How is it practiced in Bangladesh?

C3. What are a few successful examples of locally led initiatives relevant to sheltering:
   ○ (In positive answers):
   a. What were they? What kind of partnership/grant was developed and how?
   b. What worked throughout the process, and why? What were the enabling factors in this partnership/project?
   c. What did not work? What were the challenges/gaps/tensions in this partnership/project? How did your organization navigate through them?

d. What are the lessons learned from such projects/experiences?

o In case of lacking, why, in your opinion? What are the reasons behind the lack of such projects/partnerships?

a. What are the key challenges locally led initiatives facing in the sheltering sector?

b. How, in your opinion, should the sheltering sector in Bangladesh address them in the future?

C4. When international organizations work as donors, connectors or/and direct implementers in shelter and settlement response, what role do they play? What changes would you like to see in their role that will foster more effective local leadership?

C5. What advantage does your organization get when you partner with local organizations for shelter and settlement response?

C6. Can you mention a few ways in which international agencies (donors, connectors) can be evaluated and address accountability concerning their role? Do you have any examples/stories of your organization (evaluating or addressing accountability) in program-related and funding decisions?

C7. What—from your experience and understanding of the sector/context—are the main challenges/ hindering factors when it comes to increasing the role of local actors as leaders/decision makers in general /within the sheltering response in particular?

C8. Any enabling factors/conditions that you believe can/should be further enhanced to increase local leadership within the shelter response specifically in Bangladesh?

C9. What are the key lessons learned/recommendations for future localization plans within the Bangladesh context to increase local leadership or their voice in decision making? (what key changes are required and who needs to make them?)

ANNEX B: CONTEXT ANALYSIS

B.1 Country context

From 2014 to 2020, **15 major disasters affected 42 million people nationwide**, displacing 9.4 million people and damaging 4.6 million houses.

More than **769,000 people (including more than 400,000 children) from the Rakhine state of Myanmar** fled due to violence in 2017, and as of 31 July 2022, 936,733 people live in 33 overcrowded camps in Cox's Bazar and Bhasan Char (Noakhali district) (IFRC, 2022).

The geographic location of Bangladesh makes it one of the most hazard-prone areas in the world. A combination of population density, the yearly risk of flooding, frequent storms and cyclones creates an unparalleled level of vulnerability. According to past events and prospective harm, cyclones, floods, tornadoes and earthquakes provide the most significant risks among the several disasters that can occur in Bangladesh. Fire has also been a risk that frequently destroys hundreds of homes in densely populated, low-income urban areas.

The international community has appreciated Bangladesh's accomplishments in cyclone management. In Bangladesh, cooperation between government organizations, non-government organizations (NGOs) and community-based organizations (CBOs) is highly effective. The lessons learned from earlier decades and a national risk reduction objective resulted in the Comprehensive Disaster Management Programme (CDMP). The National Disaster Management Council (NDMC) is one of Bangladesh's extensive coordination networks, including line ministries, donor partners and more than 2000 district-, upazila- and union-level disaster committees. The collaboration between the government, international NGOs, other NGOs, civil society organizations, local government officials, international aid organizations and UN bodies has significantly improved. In 2022,the Minister for Disaster Management and Relief, speaking at the Global Platform for Disaster Risk Reduction, stated, "Bangladesh has achieved remarkable success in cyclone-related disasters, and the mortality rate during such natural calamities has fallen from seven digits to a single digit in the last 50 years." (Roy, 2022)

The country's community volunteering approaches, efficient early warning systems, comprehensive legal and institutional framework, thriving NGO sector, community-based decision-making system, significant donor backing and strong government commitment make Bangladesh a role model in disaster management.

Cyclones

Among the population of 160 million, over 35 million live close to the coastal area in Bangladesh, which is vulnerable in the event of a cyclone. Cyclones are a natural phenomenon in coastal Bangladesh. Once every few years, a cyclone hits with extreme power and significantly damages people's lives and livelihoods (Tahsin & Bodrud-Doza, 2022). However, the country has seen minimization of damages through continuous effort and investment from national and international disaster management actors in the past 20 years.

In November 1970, during the Bhola cyclone, more than 500,000 people lost their lives. The country (at that time, East Pakistan) was furious at the ruling government for little acknowledgment of the damage and for its negligent rehabilitation efforts. This understanding of the "lack of interest from the government for the vulnerable people" played a vital role in the country gaining independence later through protest for rights, rejecting the central power and finally, through war. After independence, a major hurricane came in April 1991, and around 139,000 people died. Following this devastating cyclone, the Bangladesh government invested in more holistic disaster risk reduction plans, including effective early warning systems and building many multi-functional community

cyclone shelters. These cyclone shelters significantly reduced storm-related fatalities. Cyclone Sidr (2007) took 3,500 lives, while Cyclone Aila (2009) took 150 lives. Fatalities came down to 20 in the 260 km/h cyclone, Amphan (2020). The number of cyclone shelters has increased from 400 to 14,000 over the past 30 years (Tahsin & Bodrud-Doza, 2022). While cyclone centers are an absolute lifesaver during the hazard, people who lose their homes and possessions must find ways to build family shelters to get back to earning a living with a protective roof over their heads. Cyclone shelters are only temporary shelters, built with just 0.186 square meters of space per person in mind (converted from BUET-BIDS, 1993).

Many organizations followed a climate-resilient home approach that can serve as mini cyclone shelters. BRAC built 35 modest two-story buildings that function as dwellings daily and small cyclone shelters during storms or tidal surges due to this adaptation technique, a community-driven project using available resources. Because of its adaptable design, the local requirements determine the building's size and height; for instance, they can be raised higher off the ground in more humid places (Ali, 2022).

Floods

Floods and the hardships experienced by those living in flood-prone areas are inextricably linked. Three separate flash floods have already happened in 2023 in the northwest (Kurigram), northeast (Sylhet), and southeast (Chattogram) at the time of this study.

Bangladesh has fewer dedicated flood shelters than cyclone shelters because the nature of these two events differs. Before any repair or restoration work can begin after a flood, the homes stay submerged for a long time. There are not many designated shelters for flood victims (Rahman et al., 2015). Shelter provides safety during a time of need. The "cyclone shelter" is well known among the people of Bangladesh, but the idea of a flood shelter is relatively new. Families typically seek refuge on embankments during floods. It is obvious that erecting embankments is not practical in many parts of the country given the geology of the region and the volume of floodwater that flows through it during the monsoon season. Flood shelters could be a very useful tool for dealing with floods in certain places. Local residents in certain parts of the nation have already built flood shelters (Alam & Ali, 2014).

Usually, flood victims prefer to stay in their own homes or nearby structures as long as possible, even if submerged. It happens due to a lack of recognized shelter where one could seek refuge during such times and the challenges of transferring one's possessions. One common practice is to build a "machan" (raised platform) higher than the anticipated flood level, and people move there with necessary belongings. Sometimes people take refuge on the roof, hoping the water level will fall soon. When that seems impossible, people move to nearby highlands and construct temporary housing structures using the materials they carry after dismantling their homes (Rahman et al., 2015). Although there is not a complete list of flood shelters in Bangladesh as there is for cyclone shelters, they can be broadly divided into community flood shelters and school-based shelters. Individual homes can also be flood shelters if the homestead is flood-proof.

Rohingya response

Since 2017, approximately 1 million Rohingya people from Myanmar's Rakhine State live in Bangladesh. They sought refuge in Bangladesh's Cox's Bazar District. This latest surge of Rohingya people is not a one-time occurrence. Since a major riot broke out in Rakhine state in western Myanmar in 1978, and the Myanmar authorities viewed the Rohingya as illegal immigrants, Bangladesh has offered refuge to the flood of Rohingya people since then. In 1978, 1991-1992, 2012, 2014 and 2016, many Rohingya migrated to Bangladesh. However, the migration in 2017 shattered all prior records, with almost 1 million people coming at once (Tashmin et al., 2021).

Following the 2017 inflow, the first responders to house the Rohingya people were the local people, now known as host communities. Though the official date of the influx is 25 August 2017, the surge of people came almost a month ago, and local people gave them places to sleep, food to eat and material to build temporary shelters.

Gradually, local or international organizations also reached there. The temporary shelters, constructed of bamboo, sticks and low-grade plastic sheeting, accommodated the Rohingya community initially. With the Shelter and Settlements Sector's support, they have gradually improved, although the situation is still challenging. Due to their fast and dense growth, the camps suffer from threats from heavy rainfall, landslides, flooding and fires.

These impact and damage the shelters, so continuous work goes on in the camps for better preparedness for disaster and reactions. For example, if there is a fire incident or flooding issues, then how to make the shelters safe or how can the community reduce and recover from the losses? Families frequently live in a single-room shelter with an average covered area of 2 to 2.5 square meters per person, including space for cooking. As the government of Bangladesh upholds a policy of non-permanent structures in the camps, the usage of building materials, including corrugated galvanized iron, concrete, steel, brick and mud, is restricted. Programs for providing shelter in such an environment must be closely related to other interventions. These include basic camp infrastructure, health, livelihoods, protection and WASH.

For the management, two UN agencies, UNHCR and IOM, cover almost all parts of the camps, dividing the supervision between them. UNHCR positions shelter and site planning together with a settlement approach. IOM has a separate shelter team that closely works with other sectors. A mix of local and international organizations implements shelter projects and responses. For example, IOM directly implements the shelter projects, creating a vast network of community leaders, known as "majhi," and a volunteer workforce from the community.

On the other hand, UNHCR has local partners (NGOs) for implementing shelter projects. Few local organizations directly sought foreign aid to implement shelter projects in the Rohingya camp. The Shelter Cluster at the camp strictly regulates the design of the shelters, in line with restrictions imposed by the government. There is no room for these local organizations to modify the design, which was developed by the Shelter Cluster to align with the government's policy at the camp.

B.2 Governance, Policies and frameworks

Localization efforts

In Bangladesh, the government utilizes the strength of local actors by involving them in the Disaster Management Committees. Such a committee is usually made up of a locally elected representative Union Parishod (Union Parishod is the smallest rural administrative and local government unit in Bangladesh) Member, headmaster of the local primary school, Imam of the local "masjid" (mosque), an NGO representative and a women's representative. Local actors are to take the lead in the actions, with remote organizations (those outside the district) acting as support actors.

During the World Humanitarian Day in 2017, the Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust (COAST) organized a seminar with many Bangladeshi NGOs Participating. The seminar was titled "Strengthening Civil Society and Promoting Localization Agenda." Emphasizing context, capacity and commitment, major demands included facilitating local NGOs through funds, preparing policies, utilizing existing networks rather than creating new ones after any disaster, and improving the accountability of local NGOs. Many esteemed professionals and representatives of local and international NGOs were present and raised various localization issues. The local NGO representative talked about the communication gap and language barrier, which puts them behind in submitting proposals as they lack expertise in English. Lack of formal registration as an entity also puts the local actors behind in times of emergency. Local organizations can implement humanitarian initiatives at a minimal administrative cost.

Other initiatives include the multi-stakeholder platform, Shongjog, formed in 2015 by a group of national and international NGOs, UN agencies, the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS) and the Department of Disaster Management. Their goal is to change policy and practice, making communicating with communities an integral part of disaster preparedness, response and post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation in Bangladesh

The National Alliance of Humanitarian Actors, Bangladesh (NAHAB), a coalition of voluntary, non-profit, non-governmental and political groups, was established in 2017 to promote and support timely, effective and balanced humanitarian actions in Bangladesh. Shared responsibility and priority for local actors are its key principles. In order to reach the most vulnerable households, NAHAB wants to encourage local actors to act as first responders and properly identify contextual needs.

An extensive overview of Bangladesh's most recent shelter and settlement programs, with a focus on refugees and disasters.

Rohingya Response Joint Response Plan (2021): This plan was outlined to support people who have fled from Myanmar to Bangladesh. It describes policies for providing refugees with suitable accommodation, access to water and sanitary facilities and other fundamental services.

National Resilience Program (2020): This program aims to make Bangladesh's most vulnerable communities more resilient to shocks and natural catastrophes. It also includes steps to enhance catastrophe risk management and community safety and requirements relating to providing shelter and settlements for displaced populations. It is a joint programming approach between the Bangladesh Government and three UN agencies (UNDP, UN Women and United Nations Office for Project Services- UNOPS). This program is being implemented by four government agencies of Bangladesh:

- Department of Disaster Management
- Programming Division of Bangladesh Planning Commission
- Department of Women Affairs
- Local Government Engineering Department.

Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) (2019): Projects in Bangladesh that address climate change adaptation and mitigation are supported financially by the BCCTF. It provides money for shelter and settlement projects to enhance living circumstances and advance environmentally friendly urban growth. The Trustee Board, consisting of 17 representatives and chaired by the Minister for Environment, Forest and Climate Change, is accountable for the entire administration of the BCCT and its functions.

Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (2019): This plan, updated from the 2009 edition, addresses the effects of climate change in Bangladesh, including housing and settlements. It has provisions for reducing the risk of disasters, adjusting to climate change and promoting sustainable development methods.

National Plan for Disaster Management (2019): This plan provides a disaster management framework in Bangladesh, which details precautions for refugees and settlements in the case of a natural disaster. It has measures for disaster risk reduction, emergency preparedness and response and the creation of institutional disaster management procedures.

National Housing Policy (2016): The framework for housing development in Bangladesh is provided by this policy, including measures for the provision of shelter for displaced people and refugees. It has provisions for the creation of partnerships to support housing development, the creation of affordable housing, and land-use planning. This program seeks to guarantee that all Bangladeshi residents, both urban and rural, have access to safe, affordable and adequate housing. It also entails steps to ensure the supply of essential housing services and the promotion of cheap and sustainable housing.

Disaster Risk Reduction Strategy (2016): This plan includes steps to address the problems with shelters and settlements in the event of disasters and offers the framework for disaster risk reduction in Bangladesh. It has measures for encouraging resilient and safe housing, creating early warning systems and giving displaced populations emergency shelter and assistance.

Bangladesh Disaster Management Regulation (2015): This law makes provisions for refuge and settlements in the case of a natural disaster and offers recommendations for disaster management in Bangladesh. It comprises

steps to ensure the safety and security of displaced populations. It also ensures the minimal requirements for emergency shelters.

Disaster Management Act (2012): This law includes the requirements for housing and settlements for displaced persons in the case of a natural disaster. It provides the legislative foundation for disaster management in Bangladesh. It describes the tasks and responsibilities of several government entities in disaster management and establishes the government's authority to respond to disasters. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief is responsible for ensuring that affiliated departments and agencies follow the act.

National Action Plan on Climate Change (2009): Measures to address the problems caused by climate change, such as those relating to settlements and housing in the event of natural catastrophes, are included in this action plan. The creation of early warning systems, the encouragement of environmentally friendly and climate-resilient housing, and the provision of temporary shelter and aid to displaced people are all covered by its provisions.

Bangladesh Refugee Policy (2005): This policy provides the basis for the protection and help of refugees in Bangladesh. Along with provisions for essential services like shelter and food, it also includes safeguards for the safety and welfare of the refugees.

Coastal Zone Policy (2005): This policy offers guidelines for the administration and development of Bangladesh's coastal regions and solutions to problems with habitation and settlement. It includes clauses that safeguard coastal populations, foster sustainable means of subsistence, and supply necessities like housing and water.

National Resettlement Policy (2004): The framework for the resettlement of displaced populations in Bangladesh, particularly those impacted by natural disasters, is provided by this policy. In addition to steps to ensure the protection and well-being of the displaced populations, it contains provisions relating to the supply of shelter and other essential services.

National Urban Settlements Development Policy (2004): This policy aims to advance just and sustainable urban development in Bangladesh. It also includes steps to solve housing shortages, expand access to housing financing, as well as regulations relating to providing basic amenities like water and sanitation.

B.2 Overview of localization efforts

Who is local?

The notion of being "local" can vary from individual to organization. In Bangladesh, the local people who are the first responders are considered local actors, and the organizations with local branches that work through local employees are also considered local actors. Even the government utilizes the strength of local actors by keeping them in the Disaster Management Committees. Such a committee is usually made up of a locally elected representative (UP Member), headmaster of a local primary school, imam of the local "masjid" (mosque), an NGO representative and a women's representative.

The process of institutionalizing local management of humanitarian initiatives is known as localization, and it aims to provide effective and timely services to the impacted populations. The local actors have the capacity to be first responders and function efficiently to identify contextual needs and reach households with the greatest risk, according to. Local actors are to take the lead in the actions, with remote organizations (those outside the district) acting as support actors.

The structure of the current positions of power, default procedures and rewards support the status quo. The humanitarian system lacks obvious cues like incentives or defaults, and donors and connectors hardly ever promote the intended behaviors. Because of this, there is little consistency or responsibility, which makes it less likely to influence the intended behavior and to bridge the gap.

Activities

To prioritize localization, many seminars and discussions have been conducted among the local, national and international actors. Local actors from grassroot-organizations are given the platform to voice their issues, and the global actors express their intention to bridge the gap.

One such event was held to observe World Humanitarian Day in 2017, arranged by COAST (Coastal Association for Social Transformation Trust) and Bangladeshi NGOs for the World Humanitarian Summit. The seminar was titled "Strengthening Civil Society and Promoting Localization Agenda." The Bangladeshi NGOs and community service organizations (CSOs) raised 18 expectations and requests for the international NGOs, donors and UN agencies after reflecting on one year of the World Humanitarian Summit, Grand Bargain, and Development Effectiveness Principles. This results from extensive collaboration among Bangladeshi NGOs engaged in the World Humanitarian Summit from 2015 to 2017; it was presented at the event, which received support from 50 NGOs (Local and International).

Emphasizing context, capacity and commitment, major demands included:

- Facilitating local NGOs through funds.
- Preparing policies.
- Utilizing existing networks rather than creating new ones after any disaster.
- Improving the accountability of local NGOs.

Many esteemed professionals and representatives of local and international NGOs were present and raised various localization issues. The local NGO representative talked about the communication gap and language barrier, which puts them behind in submitting proposals as they lack expertise in English. Lack of formal registration as an entity also puts the local actors behind in times of emergency. Local organizations can implement humanitarian initiatives at a minimal administrative cost (Local Civil Society demands equitable partnership from international NGOs and UN agencies, 2017).

Oxfam and COAST collaborated on an initiative named "CSO-NGO Sector with Self-esteem: Campaign on Grand Bargain and Localization" to advance localization and build self-esteem and accountability. The project intends to mobilize local and national Bangladeshi NGOs and CSOs to develop their commitment and accountability in order to meet expectations from UN, donors and international NGOs in the light of the World Humanitarian Summit outcome 'Building Self-Esteem CSO-NGO Sector, Campaign on Grand Bargain and Localization: Divisional workshop' titled workshop was held in various regions (i.e., Sylhet, Mymensingh) of the country.

Networks/platforms

Some organizations/platforms focusing on localization in humanitarian response in Bangladesh.

- Following a consultation process between the humanitarian community and the government, Bangladesh implemented the humanitarian cluster system, in the form of the **Humanitarian Coordination Task Team (HCTT)**, in 2012. HCTT was formed under the Local Consultative Group Disaster and Emergency Response (LCG-DER), with nine humanitarian clusters and several working groups. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR)—the country's primary disaster management body—and the Office of the UN Resident Coordinator collaborate on the HCTT to effectively cooperate with the international community. Based on the SPEED methodology (solving problems efficiently, effectively and decisively), the HCTT coordinates actions for risk mitigation, recovery and response to disasters. (Humanitarian Coordination Task Team, 2021) The HCTT advocates improving humanitarian-civil-military coordination.
- The multi-stakeholder platform **"Shongjog"** was formed in 2015 by a group of NGOs and UN agencies alongside the BDRCS and the Department of Disaster Management. Its goal is to change policy and practice toward making communicating with communities an integral part of disaster preparedness, response and post-disaster reconstruction and rehabilitation in Bangladesh (http://www.shongjog.org.bd).

- A coalition of voluntary, non-profit, non-governmental and political groups called **NAHAB** was established to promote and support timely, effective and balanced humanitarian actions in Bangladesh in 2017. Shared responsibility, and prioritization to local actors are its key principles. In order to reach the most vulnerable households, NAHAB wants to encourage local actors to act as first responders and properly identify contextual needs (https://www.nahab.net).
- **Bangladesh Shelter Cluster** promotes the inclusion of disaster risk reduction measures in the design and construction of shelters and settlements. The Bangladesh Shelter Cluster aims to give disaster victims the means to live in a safe, dignified and suitable shelter.

Challenges and barriers in localization efforts

Many local NGOs do not get paid for overhead costs during their project. A review report reveals that 55% of the project budget does not include managerial costs (7-point indicators from the COAST report). Regarding improving their long-term financial viability, 70% of local NGOs indicated that they did not receive any assistance, and 80% of local NGOs reported that they did not receive any help in times of emergency or additional funding for recruiting more qualified staff to tackle the problems. Beyond the current project structure, local NGOs receive little to no support.

It is crucial to define the localization agenda clearly from the perspective of local stakeholders. In the humanitarian sector, it is evident that even if local NGOs receive the majority of overall financing, neither their rise to prominence nor the empowerment of the community is assured. Appropriate cooperation between the government, national and international NGOs should be maintained to bring about noticeable change.

International NGOs and donors, most of the time, create new networks as a part of their project achievements, but later on, the networks hardly sustain. So, the international NGOs and donors should try with the existing networks first, make the efforts transparent, inclusive and participatory, rather than creating unnecessary tensions within the wider NGO sector (Strengthening Civil Society and promoting localization agenda, 2018).

Local Bangladeshi organizations are not "local" to the Rohingya, and tensions with the host community must be considered carefully when shifting power to locally led organizations. If "local" is taken to mean "regional," or if the local community is not the same as the affected population, as is the case in displacement, then local tensions may undermine the dignity of affected populations (Holloway, 2022).

Sometimes many agencies' responses are reinventing the wheel. New responses should be guided by the existing shelter capacity that has already been built up in an environment of repeated disasters.

B.3 Shelter and settlements response

It is a prevailing international consensus that "Sheltering is a process." It implies that humanitarian actors should strive to support the affected communities as they respond to the disaster in various stages in line with their increasing ability for recovery, helping them step by step to return to livable housing conditions. Instead of only constructing houses, shelter response can be about strengthening communities, co-designing shelters, distributing money and vouchers for basic shelter construction, or supporting host communities in various ways. Sheltering is not about giving a "product," such as a completed house, but rather about assisting the impacted communities' process of recovering their shelter, whether the end product is only construction or not.

In practice, there are two phases where shelter actors work according to the Bangladesh Shelter Cluster: the emergency and recovery phases. In the emergency phase, most shelter responses revolve around distributing different kinds of emergency kits and non-food item distribution. The emergency kit includes :

- Tents.
- Kitchen utensils.
- Tarpaulin.
- Posts of bamboo or wood.

- Corrugated Iron sheets.
- Shelter toolkits.

Along with the kit, sometimes, training is also provided to the community for maximized use of the shelter kit items.

In the recovery phase, the shelter responses depend on the type of hazard the region faces. There are responses for both partial shelters repairing or strengthening, or complete construction. For example, many organizations support plinth raising in flood-prone areas and different techniques to make plinths resistant for longer days in water. Resilient and raised plinths help to increase their self-resiliency. Care Bangladesh has supported households in the "chars" (areas of land surrounded by water) of Kurigram, Jamalpur and Gaibandha and raised their plinth in a way that is 1 meter higher than the highest flood level.

In the north, one particular shelter project done by an national NGO named Friendship is called "Plinth Raise." Plinth Raise is an elevated village, allowing people to stay home even when the water level rises during the flood. The Plinth Raise village is oval. The shape came for a scientific reason; a sharp edge is more prone to erosion against strong water, whereas the soft edge of the oval shape will let the water flow without having the edges much damaged. In regular times 20-30 landless people can live here. During the flood, 100-150 families can bring their possessions, livestock and harvests, take shelter on the raised plinth and stay clear of water, so the whole village works as a community flood shelter.

The organizations are also advocating this kind of modality to the government to incorporate this strategy in their programs, as it is a good model for addressing many households within a lower per-household shelter repairing budget.

The recovery response in the southern region (cyclone-prone area) is about strengthening the roofs of houses against the wind. Different roof tying-down methods (such as J-tie, cross bracing), tools, and structural members (bamboo, wood or reinforced cement concrete post) are given to affected households. In both flood and cyclone-prone areas, training the local mason with improved techniques has been a critical strategy for the shelter actors to reach maximum households in increasing the resiliency of shelters.

Most of the complete construction shelter response has been demonstration projects, as it costs more. BRAC has built 35 such houses in three coastal districts in one program. The two-story houses are designed to withstand cyclones. Though each house is home to one household, 35-40 people can take shelter during the hazard.
The national NGO Friendship has developed a similar model with HBRI and built four houses in four districts (Shyamnagar, Mongla, Satkhira and Kolapara). The concept is again to make each house a mini cyclone shelter for the neighborhood. Locally dredged soil and cement are the core components of the blocks used to build these shelters. The local people made the blocks and channels with training from HBRI, then they built houses with those blocks. As the local people were part of the block-making, designing and constructing, they showed significant ownership of the houses. The technology of making eco-friendly blocks and building cyclone-resilient homes was transferred to the local community.

HBRI continuously works with any organization that comes forward to seek technical assistance and innovation in shelter response. Bangladesh Shelter Cluster and HBRI worked together to create two shelter designs for disadvantaged groups for the most recent flash flood in Sylhet in 2023. The technical expert team from HBRI traveled to the site, talked to the locals, created the principal design and then validated the design later. Two shelter actors are currently implementing this design.

BDRCS's integrated programs show a few good locally led shelter response practices. First, they do a baseline household survey or needs assessment and validate the data with the community. Later they developed a shelter design with community consultation. There is also a feedback and complaint mechanism in the process. Suppose the most vulnerable families do not get into the beneficiary list after need assessment. In that case, they can contact the assistance-providing organization, and the complaints are always well handled. Many organizations try to adhere to a similar shelter response process, believing the solution must come from the community.

The Shelter and Settlements Sector in the Rohingya response

In the initial stages, Bangladeshi local host communities welcomed the Rohingya community with the most open heart, unlike many other places worldwide, where protests happened against the government for allowing refugees. On the contrary, in Bangladesh, the local people were unprecedentedly very welcoming before the international community had come into the scene. The local communities allowed the Rohingya population on their land and helped them to source sticks, branches, bamboo, trees, etc., to make the first makeshift shelters.

> **"Officially, 25 August is the start of the influx, but being in the field, I know it was happening for the previous six months. The incident first broke out in December 2016. We could see from the hilltop Teknaf point, we could see the other side, we could see the burn. Since then, there has been a small influx and the local people have been accommodating throughout. This is a number one example, the engagement of the local people, how they have welcomed the oppressed community by sheltering them and allowing them to be in safer space."** (*B8, male, international NGO, July 2023*)

When the international and local organizations started working, they first provided the Rohingya community with emergency shelter kits and non-food items, including tarpaulin and ropes. The quality of the shelters built was not adequate or durable. Then the second phase was distributing upgraded shelter kits, which included material for tying the shelter down and making it durable. The main challenge was inadequate land area and topography. The kits are made by following a stepwise strategy because there is little area available for the typical household to expand. It was crucial that these kits also come with technical support, IEC (Information, Education and Communication) materials and training to ensure a real improvement in living standards. Then came the mid-term shelter initiative, intended to give beneficiaries shelters that last longer than temporary and emergency shelters. Now there is transitional shelter assistance with treated bamboo and angle footings. The houses are 10 feet by 15 feet (approximately 3 meters by 4.5 meters), including the cooking space; the outer walls are woven bamboo panels, and the roof is tarpaulin, placed in the woven bamboo split-frame structure.

The Shelter and Settlements Sector at the Rohingya camp is now working to find options for fire resistance within the government's strict regulation of material use. Permitted materials (tarpaulins and bamboo) are very inflammable. Corrugated galvanized iron sheet is neither permitted nor appropriate in the windy region of Cox's Bazar. Non-repurposable, tile-like brick can be one of the few options that the Shelter Cluster wants to develop and negotiate with the government to reduce losses in the fire.

From the Rohingya communities' perspective, the real struggle is the lack of space and no permission for vertical expansion. A family of eight that arrived in 2017 has become a family of 11 in 2023. Within the gray of "dire need" and "no permission", many families think they will have to create a mezzanine floor soon, so they try to collect some building materials little by little. There are many households where they made 'pucca' flooring on their initiative without any external aid or international response. It is crucial that their initiatives are recognized.

The findings of the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment 2019 revealed that the Rohingya community's top concerns are rotted bamboo, broken shelters, leaking roofs and defective materials. The upgraded shelter kit, transitional shelter assistance and mid-term shelter programs have improved living conditions. However, the Multi-Sector Needs Assessment 2019 2019 results show that the shelter response must continue to change to prevent entropy. Partners are urged to set up pilot studies to evaluate the appropriateness of alternative building materials and community-driven shelter initiatives to assist this goal.

> **"Things never went exactly as planned, but it was a huge task that many organizations worked together to pull out. And I guess, many organizations have more awareness now than before going through this process."** (*B5, female, UN/IO, June 2023*)

ANNEX C: STAKEHOLDER MAPPING

There are many international, national, local agencies that are involved in various types of humanitarian responses in Bangladesh. For this research, the following actors have been identified who focus on the Shelter and Settlements Sector at various scales.

International NGOs	
Name	**Actions related to shelter and settlements**
Action Aid	The "Happy Home" initiative (shelter for street children) in Dhaka. Rohingya response: Shelter, WASH, Women's Safe Space.
CARE Bangladesh	Action for Supporting the Host Communities: Adaptation and Resilience project (known as " ASHAR Alo") funded by USAID has the main focus on WASH, Shelter, disaster risk reduction through cash-for-work activity, and gender-based violence in Ukhiya and Ramu upazila of Cox's Bazar. Project Duration: August 1, 2019 to July 31, 2022.
Caritas Bangladesh	Implemented low-cost housing project for 450,000 families all over Bangladesh since 1970 and for forcefully displaced myanmar nationals around 45,000 households received shelter support. Emergency shelter/NFI response program for COVID-19-affected Rohingya community. Also helped rebuild makeshift shelters immediately after fire incidents. Provide technical support and necessary materials to ensure immediate access to water and sanitation.
Habitat for Humanity Bangladesh	Implemented Disaster Resilient Housing as part of a project funded by the Korea International Cooperation Agency's Humanitarian Assistance program.
Islamic Relief Bangladesh	Implementing organization for Shelter Cluster.
Muslim Aid Bangladesh	Emergency shelter material (tarpaulin) in Rohingya response.
Oxfam in Bangladesh	Project "Empowering Local and National Humanitarian Actors" (ELNHA).
Adventist Development and Relief Agency	In 2017 ADRA Bangladesh distributed more than 12,000 shelter kits among the Rohingya community in different camps through their Rakhine Crisis Response at Cox's Bazar Bangladesh project. They have been involved in shelter kits distribution, site improvement, upgrade of makeshift shelters in the camp since then.

National NGOs	
Name	**Actions related to shelter and settlements**
BRAC	Direct support for shelter, support for raised plinth in flood-prone areas Constructing climate-resilient houses that double as mini cyclone shelters Retaining wall for hati in haor areas Cow shed construction
DHAKA Ahsania Mission	Humanitarian WASH for Rohingya community and host communities Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh
Friends In Village Development Bangladesh	Implementing organization for Shelter Cluster
HEED Bangladesh	Mostly distributes shelter packages after disaster
Institute of Development Affairs	Implementing organization for Shelter Cluster
Mahideb Jubo Samaj Kallyan Somity	New shelter construction, repairing, raising plinth of households, schools; active in the northern region
Uttaran	Implementing organization for Shelter Cluster in Rohingya camp for shelter/NFI/site management support during floods and cyclones
Voluntary Association for Rural Development	Implementing organization for Shelter Cluster during flood
Jago Nari	Jago Nari was founded in 1998 with a focus on women and children's development. Education, health and DRR assistance are their priorities. They have experience in both individual shelter and cyclone shelter support in the coastal area only
Multi Serve International	Shelter package distribution and construction in the Rohingya camp through direct funding

National Network	
Name	**Actions related to shelter and settlements**
Bangladesh Shelter Cluster	Coordination between government and shelter actors, collecting data and profiles of all shelter actors in the country.

National Authorities		
Name	**Departments/units**	**Actions related to shelter and settlements**
Armed Forces Division		Assist in preparation of temporary shelter Render assistance in the reconstruction of houses Construction of cyclone shelters
Ministry of Housing and Public Works	**HBRI**	HBRI developed the "Standard guideline for rural housing in disaster-prone areas of Bangladesh"
	Department of Architecture	
	National Housing Authority	Responsible for implementing the national government's housing policies
	Public Works Department	Responsible for the construction and maintenance of public schools, government official buildings, hospitals, monuments, etc.
	Urban Development Directorate	Prepare and coordinate regional plans, master plans and detailed area plans
Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief	**Department of Disaster Management**	Cyclone shelter construction, maintenance and management
Ministry of Environment and Forests	**Bangladesh Forest Department**	Executed UNDP's ICBA-AR project (innovative ecosystem-based farming models, green shelterbelt in the coastal zone) to strengthen community involvement in, and ownership of forestry-based adaptation and climate risk reduction activities. The project has constructed six "killa" (raised earthen platforms), which can shelter approximately 15,000 livestock during disasters
Ministry of Local Government, Rural Development and Cooperatives	**Local Government Engineering Department**	Multi-purpose Disaster Shelter Project (World Bank funded Bangladesh government project)
Ministry of Water Resources	**Water Development Board**	Repair embankments to tackle river erosion

Public universities/national institutions	
Name	**Actions related to shelter and settlements**
Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology	Technical research support.
Institute of Architects Bangladesh	In response to flooding in Sylhet in 2022, a wash facility and an experimental floating structure were built in Lohajuri village.

International NGOs/international institutions	
Name	**Actions related to shelter and settlements**
International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies **Bangladesh Red Crescent Society**	Shelter Programming in flood-prone areas (flood 2019 recovery program), support in Rohingya and host communities.
Bangladesh Shelter Cluster	Technical shelter guidelines, sheltering support in various stages.
UN-Habitat	Climate change interventions, slum upgrading, and urban poverty reduction, promoting urban public spaces and city governance, and supporting humanitarian actions, particularly settlement planning under the refugee response program, are all included in UN-Habitat's technical assistance provided to Bangladesh. With UNHCR they also launched the Settlement Profiling Tool.
UNHCR	UNHCR and its partners support refugee households to maintain their shelters with materials including bamboo, tarpaulin, rope and wires. In preparation for cyclone and monsoon season, essential materials are distributed to all households to reinforce the shelters. In order to improve the housing circumstances for the Rohingya community in line with government policy, innovative designs continue to be tested in 2022. UNHCR is still pushing for the adoption of the widespread implementation of these upgraded designs. They also establish bamboo treatment plants, plan for camp upgrading and facilitate rationalization.
UNDP	Works through community network and implements climate-resilient housing.
IOM	Major international organization in managing shelter responses in Rohingya Camps.