



Enabling poor rural people  
to overcome poverty



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**Pro-poor Resource Governance under  
Changing Climates**  
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***- Executive Summaries of Case Studies -***

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## BANGLADESH: Environmental and Social Vulnerability of the Poor under Climate Change Conditions – The Char Lands in Bangladesh



Most Bangladeshis earn their livelihood from agriculture and Bangladesh is not only subject to frequent natural hazards, but also considered to be one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change. This creates a difficult situation which is expected to exacerbate in future, especially for the rural poor who depend on natural resources for their livelihood.

The case study examines the case of Bangladesh's coastal region, where the continuous process of erosion and deposition of silt results in the accretion of 'Char lands'. Rapid erosion of farmland on the shores of rivers and estuaries makes many people landless, who then migrate to the newly emerged chars to rebuild their livelihoods. The chars are a pocket of extreme poverty.

The case study was elaborated in collaboration with IASS by the Research and Evaluation Division (RED) of BRAC, a non-governmental development organization. It examines: (i) the multiple vulnerabilities the char dwellers face; (ii) to what extend these vulnerabilities are exacerbated by the impacts of climate change; and (iii) how an improved access and security of tenure to natural resources and other services can reduce the livelihood vulnerability. In some parts of the study area, the Char Development and Settlement Project (CDSP) – implemented by the Government of Bangladesh with support from IFAD and the Government of the Netherlands – delivers infrastructure, land titles and other measures for the improvement of livelihoods. The study is based on quantitative data on climate and households as well as qualitative data on livelihoods, perceptions of climate change and coping strategies after environmental hazards, collected for seven chars.

The study enlightens the livelihood patterns, finding that access to sanitation and other infrastructure is significant higher in the areas with CDSP intervention. Agriculture is severely hampered due to the combined effects of environmental and social hardships and the highest household expenses are dedicated to recover from recent natural hazards. The chars have been found to be highly contested: In non-intervention areas or before CDSP starts operating in a given region, local landlords take control of the land and establish an illegal rule with the help of private armies. They exploit the deprived settlers in manifold ways and sell land to them. The CDSP, along with other project components, guarantees equally distributed access to land and the provision of land titles for wives and husbands.

By documenting the livelihood patterns and the impact of environmental hazards and climate change in the char region, the study shows how environmental vulnerabilities are interrelated with social vulnerabilities. It also demonstrates that vulnerability can be addressed at both dimensions, as in the case of CDSP, where the provision of secure access to land consists in a major factor for the reduction of livelihoods vulnerabilities.

## BRAZIL: Food Security, Agroecology and the Directions of Sustainable Development in the Brazilian Semiarid



The family farming sector in the Brazilian Semiarid finds itself at the crossroads of several topics and tendencies. As in other regions of the country, family farmers produce the majority of food consumed in the region, but they are still one of the poorest and most marginalized sections of society. The regional ecosystem – the *sertão*, a unique biome found only in the Northeast region – is already severely degraded, and many places are suffering from advanced desertification processes. Furthermore, regional climate projections indicate that the Brazilian Semiarid will suffer from significant reductions of precipitation, more frequent and severe droughts, and gradual increases in mean temperature.

The case study was prepared in collaboration with PATAc, a local NGO which has worked with family farmers for more than three decades. It touches upon the implications of these diverse tendencies for family farmers in the region. Furthermore, it advances the understanding on how the family farmer sector may contribute to great challenges posed by Brazilian society, such as social justice, food security, and sustainable use of natural resources.

In the first part, an historical depiction of the economic and social development of the region was elaborated, from the colonization in the coastal zone to the occupation of the Northeast hinterland. The second part presents a more detailed account of the different development models that emerged since the second-half of XIX century, analyzing its relevance to the actual context. It identifies the cultural and popular elements which, being contrary to dominant models, have inspired poor populations and which keep contributing to the undergoing construction of a new development paradigm for the region.

The third part describes the food security and the climate context, and it introduces the national debate and a critique of the dominant food regime building upon the emerging discourse on theory and practice of agroecology. This is followed by the empirical study developed in the semiarid region of Paraíba State, in the territories of Cariri, Seridó and Curimataú.

It was found that the formulation of this new development paradigm is reaching practical ground, being built upon the “Coexistence with the Dry” and “Agroecological-based Family Farming” discourses. The study examines the principles, technologies, approaches and methods, the role of different actors, organizations and supporting agencies, as well as the perception of farmers and their allies about these transformations.

The conclusions suggest that this emerging paradigm is viable, albeit being still placed as a counter-alternative to the dominant development model. Although cases of excellence are found, they still occupy rather limited area of the analyzed territories. The study demonstrates that the barriers for its expansions are mostly found at the local governance level, where traditional economical interests are strongly connected with political elites. Thus, local government structures – its agencies, programs and policies – serve these elites and demonstrate little interests to the alternative proposals brought by the coexistence and agroecological discourses. A more favorable environment is found at the National level, while at the Regional (State) level, the situation is unclear. Finally, the case demonstrates that effective strategies for reducing livelihood vulnerability, such as the wide spreading use of small-scale water harvesting technologies, are certainly not only a question of technological deployment, but also a historical struggle for the empowerment of previously marginalized families.

## BOLIVIA 1: Alternatives for the Sustainable Development of Alto Beni

**CDE**  
 CENTRE FOR DEVELOPMENT  
 AND ENVIRONMENT

The sub humid mountainous rainforests of Alto Beni, located from La Paz towards the Amazon, are a hot spot of biodiversity. The region, initially occupied by local indigenous groups, has witnessed an influx of settlers from the Andean region. These groups cultivate the valley area whereas the slopes are mainly covered with secondary rainforests. However, most agricultural practices are not adapted to the ecosystem, leading to soil erosion and increasingly to land degradation. Furthermore, it is expected that the agro-ecosystem will be even more under pressure due to foreseen climate change impacts. According to the local populations, some of these have already been perceived, such as more heat, more droughts, and a prolonged dry season.

In this context, the University of Bern in Switzerland in collaboration with IASS elaborated a case study which explores how farmers have been addressing the consequences of climate change and unsustainable land use through new institutional arrangements, such as cooperatives and other types of organizations. It was seen how these arrangements could facilitate knowledge exchange and capacity building. It was also explored if by fostering agroforestry, some organizations could contribute to the development of a common understanding on sustainable development and desirable agro-ecosystems.

The study identified internal and external actors related to the use of natural resources – ranging from subsistence family farmers to oil companies – which were then interviewed regarding their rationales behind the use of natural resources, freedom of choice, and participation options in local decision making.

It was found that frequently the decisions of using natural resources were highly unsustainable, degrading forest, soil, biodiversity, and water resources. Actors were often aware of this, but felt trapped in collective dilemmas. Different solutions were found, nevertheless, by a group of organic cocoa growers (about 1500 families) organized in cooperatives, most of which implemented agroforestry systems. Several advantages were perceived inside this group, such as better income opportunities (42% higher prices for cocoa, high value timber trees), more resilience to climate change (shaded cocoa trees) and improved soil fertility. This was possible by profiting from extension services and capacity building activities organized by these collaborative arrangements. Also important was their own perception of a better understanding of sustainable agricultural practices and their strong ethical commitment to it.

Notwithstanding the benefits, adoption rates of agroforestry systems remained comparatively low. Entry barriers and lack of financial incentives were found to be important obstacles for up-scaling these strategies. For overcoming these hindrances, better coordination between the different government levels would be needed and support would have to be more comprehensive, touching not only market chain or capacity building, but also addressing the structural reasons which inhibits the vulgarization of success cases. In this regard, strong self-organization of small-scale farmers can be crucial to induce sustainable resource use, because of its role in assisting more horizontal knowledge transmission for the development of more sustainable agricultural systems and more pro-poor market chains.

## INDIA: Increasing Resilience to Climate Change through Community-based Management of Common Land



Traditionally, India's common land has been managed collectively on a local level. In southern Rajasthan, more than 70 percent of the land is common land, including forests, pastures and mixed areas. Most of the population in the area are tribal (70 percent), poor, and depending on natural resources for their livelihoods. Different socio-political reasons as well as impacts of climate change contribute to an increased degradation and contestation of the common land. Besides, changes in institutional arrangements have led to changes in power relations.

The case study was elaborated in collaboration with IASS by Seva Mandir, a local civil society organization from southern Rajasthan. It examines the significance of and preconditions for common land management and its impacts on livelihoods under the conditions of climate change. Extensive data collection took place in seven different villages which were selected according to their history of communal land management, mainly using qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, and participatory mapping.

The study describes the significance of common lands for the livelihoods and reveals the legal and customary rights and governing institutions regarding common lands in the area. It examines different cases of successful and failed attempts for community-based management of common land and asks for the underlying influence factors. Inter alia, it shows that encroachments on land are used for agricultural purposes, but also have a strong underlying social reason as the possession of land demonstrates status. The study also documents the impacts of common land governance, such as land use change towards agricultural use, and the vital importance of commons for many to cover their need, especially for fodder. Previously, vulnerable people frequently faced deficiency in fodder supply. A clear improvement of this was observed, being an example of the increasing resilience to changing and less predictable climate patterns. The study shows the benefits of community-based governance of common lands, but reveals that it requires facilitation, nurturing and long-term support in order to be successful and beneficial in the long run. In order to achieve this, local institutions and leadership must be strengthened and the implementation of existing policies such as the Forest Rights Act must be increased.

The study demonstrates that a community-based management of common lands can reduce livelihood vulnerability. By strengthening the livelihoods, resilience to climate change is increased. However, community-based management of common lands requires long term support.

## BOLIVIA 2: Indigenous Management of a Territory facing the Expansion of the Agricultural Frontier



The indigenous territory of Lomerío, located approximately 400 km from the city of Santa Cruz in the Chiquitanía region, has been historically occupied by indigenous groups. These populations have suffered vastly in their long history of relationship with colonizers, from missionary missions to the establishment of rubber extraction areas. Starting from the 1980s, different strategies have been pursued by the Chiquitanos of Lomerío with the objective of securing their traditional land. After many years of severe struggles, these populations have managed to acquire the formal recognition of their territory by the Bolivian State in 2006.

The study, produced in collaboration with IASS by Fundación Tierra, a Bolivian NGO working with land issues for many years, examines how governance of natural resources in Lomerío has been transformed in the process of instituting the indigenous territory, looking both at the wider national context and the particular case of Lomerío. Furthermore, it explores how the recognition of the communal territory has changed the capacity of the population to adjust their livelihoods in the face of external stressors, such as increasing demand for natural resources and climate change.

Recent modifications in the Bolivia legal framework in favor of the recognition of communal land rights for indigenous populations were firstly analyzed. At least at the legislative level, several advancements were observed, such as the institution of plurinationality as the basis of the Bolivian State, and the improved territorial rights in favor of indigenous peoples, including the right for self determination. While many changes have been witnessed regarding the recognition for territorial rights, the economy of Bolivia is still dominated by a model relying almost exclusively on the export of primary products – oil and gas, mining, and agricultural products. These sectors have been expanding, putting additional pressure on resources and leading to escalating conflicts for the control of resources.

The case of Lomerío shows that the historical struggle of the Chiquitano people for having their territory recognized in the first place, and their subsequent efforts for sustainable managing the resources of the territory, are part of a strategy for the conservation of their resources in the face of external pressures, besides a struggle for conserving their lifestyle itself. Their claims go much beyond land titling, touching aspects of autonomy and capacity for self-governing, where ethnicity plays a unifying role. In this regards, it can be considered a partially successful story, since the Chiquitanos have managed to achieve not only the legal recognition of their territory, but also the control of the local government structures.

Nevertheless, some questions remain open regarding the future of Lomerío community. While the establishment of the territory clearly countered the expansion of the agricultural frontier, growing commercial interest in the areas of forest and mining, both from outsiders and insiders, increases the risk that resources will be degraded without generating social and economic benefit for the community. The study demonstrates that the recognition of communal land rights is not enough for inhibiting the expansion of resource depleting and unsustainable extractive industries.

## BURKINA FASO: Addressing Conflicts in a Pastoral Zone under Resource Pressure



80 percent of the Burkinabe rely on natural resources for their livelihoods and livestock keeping is of central importance for them as well as for the country's economy.

The case study was elaborated in collaboration with IASS by GRAF (*Groupe de Recherche et d'Action sur le Foncier / Group of Research and Action on Soil*), a local civil society organization. It examines the case of the pastoral zone of Samorogouan, located in south-western Burkina Faso. The study area is characterized by severe lack of infrastructure (roads, electricity, etc.), a high rate of poverty, and - compared to other parts of the country – higher rainfall, lower average temperatures and higher fertility. The study analyzed the complex history and the current status and situation of the pastoral zone, deriving lessons for resource governance and pastoralism in the broader region. It is mostly based on qualitative data, collected through focus group discussions, general village meetings and interviews in selected villages throughout the pastoral zone.

After the severe droughts in the 1970s, the government of Burkina Faso embarked on a World Bank-financed project to create this vast pastoral zone. The project aimed at an intensification of livestock farming and a sedentarisation of the pastoralists. After the 1983 revolution and the abrupt withdrawal of the World Bank from the project, activities were drastically reduced due to funding shortfalls and the implementation was left incomplete. In the following years, the boundaries and status of the zone was unclear. Additionally, migrants from other areas settled in the zone from the 1980s on. They started practicing agriculture inside the pastoral zone, influencing the general land use towards a massive extension of (commercial) agriculture. With severe reduction of the vegetative cover and increasing soil degradation, along with the strong densification of the settlement and the unclear status of the zone, a rising number of conflicts are being observed.

During research, local people welcomed the study and expressed a high demand for the establishment of a platform where the different stakeholders could meet and discuss the situation. Workshops were held on the local as well as on the national level, bringing together all relevant actors. The Ministry of Animal Resources took on the responsibility to initiate a multi-stakeholder process towards sustainable land management in the pastoral zone. This process would initiate negotiations to form new resource use rules, accompanied by GRAF.

The case study demonstrates that responsible resource governance at its core is a social issue that includes access and tenure rights as well as transparent norms and mechanism for dealing with conflicts. It shows that dialogue and multi-stakeholder approaches can be a useful tool for the necessary (re)negotiation of rights and rules when resources are under pressure.

## ECUADOR: Natural Resource Governance in the Indigenous Territories of Imbabura Andean region



Resources tenure, in particular land tenure, has historically always been a disputed issue in Ecuador. In very general terms, the Andean region, traditionally occupied by diverse indigenous groups, was colonized by force in a system composed mostly of large handholdings. Meanwhile servitude relations were imposed by landlords to the local populations. This "*sistema haciendatario*" has witnessed a slow evolution. However, some of its structural characteristics remained largely untouched. Some of those are the unequal land distribution and the coexistence – sometimes conflictive – of 'white' and formal resource governance systems with governance systems of indigenous base, where community and informal institutions predominate.

In this complex context, two recent tendencies have been observed. One refers to a growing demand – and consequently growing pressure – for all types of natural resources, including water and land. The second tendency is climate change, which adds another stress on the already pressured resources. It is seen that these two tendencies have increased disputes for natural resources all over the world, putting into evidence the concept of resources control by vulnerable populations.

With this in sight, the SIPAE (*Sistema de Investigación de la Problemática Agraria en Ecuador / Research System on Agrarian Issues of Ecuador*), in collaboration with IASS investigated the dimensions of resources control in indigenous spaces of Imbabura Andean Region. Three situations were explored.

In the community of Yuracruz, during an agrarian reform implemented in the 1960s and 1970s, the indigenous populations managed to achieve formal recognition of small individual parcels that were historically occupied, but they have not accessed the communal *páramo* zone, higher lands extremely important for water regulation. In Yuracruz this area was appropriated by an external farmer. Starting from 2000, when the owner decided to intensify its dairy production, dramatically changing the land use, the community downstream started suffering from lower water quantity and quality. The vulnerable population of Yuracruz is clearly affected by their lack of the resource control inside their territory.

The second case explores the situation in the community of El Batán, which exemplifies a trend observed in many other communities in the region. Retired foreigners from Europe and North America have been acquiring land, generating a speculative process that essentially closes the available options indigenous peoples had to obtain land through credit and social assistance cooperatives. The third situation explores the case of a much more structured community that through historical struggles have managed to achieve a certain control over almost their entire territory. The community of Morochos finds itself in a much better position to face the challenges identified before, making them much less vulnerable to climate change and the increasing pressure on resources.

The study demonstrates that pro-poor adaptation can imply manifestly political processes, where alliances are formed and rights over resources are redefined. The historical struggle of indigenous populations for breaking their structural political marginalization is highlighted in the study, particularly how changes in the way resources are governed in the Andean region implied enormous changes in the vulnerability of poor rural populations.