

Entangled impacts, differential capacities: A relational lens on gender-responsive social protection and adaptation in southern Bangladesh

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Introduction

Entangled impacts of climate change, COVID-19, and rising prices shape differential vulnerabilities and capacities.

- Gender, livelihood, ownership and access to resources, and type of social protection (SP) benefit
- Role of SP in addressing gender inequality (see [Camilletti 2020](#)), and a growing recognition of the ‘adaptive’ social protection in the face of climatic shocks and stresses (see [Tenzing 2020](#)).
- How SP benefits might shape longer-term adaptive capacities and well-being remains less well understood, especially for slow-onset events, like salinization (see [Nesbitt-Ahmed 2023](#)).

Context: Delta region of southern Bangladesh

- Rapid onset events like cyclones and floods occur together with slow onset salinization.
- Climate mainstreaming in adaptation and development planning, but much remains to be known about effect of SP programs on climate resilience and well-being ([Kundo et al. 2023](#)).

Research Questions

Do social protection (SP) and complementary programs targeting rural women in southern Bangladesh help strengthen their capacities to cope with and adapt to interlocking shocks and stresses?

Are there unintended consequences and challenges?

How can SP and complementary program design be improved to better address needs and concerns?

Methodology

Women beneficiaries from 2 SP programs:

Transfer Modality Research Initiative (TMRI):

- Cash transfer
- Food transfer + complementary nutrition behavior change communication (BCC) component

Vulnerable Group Development (VGD)

- Food transfer
- Started as Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF)



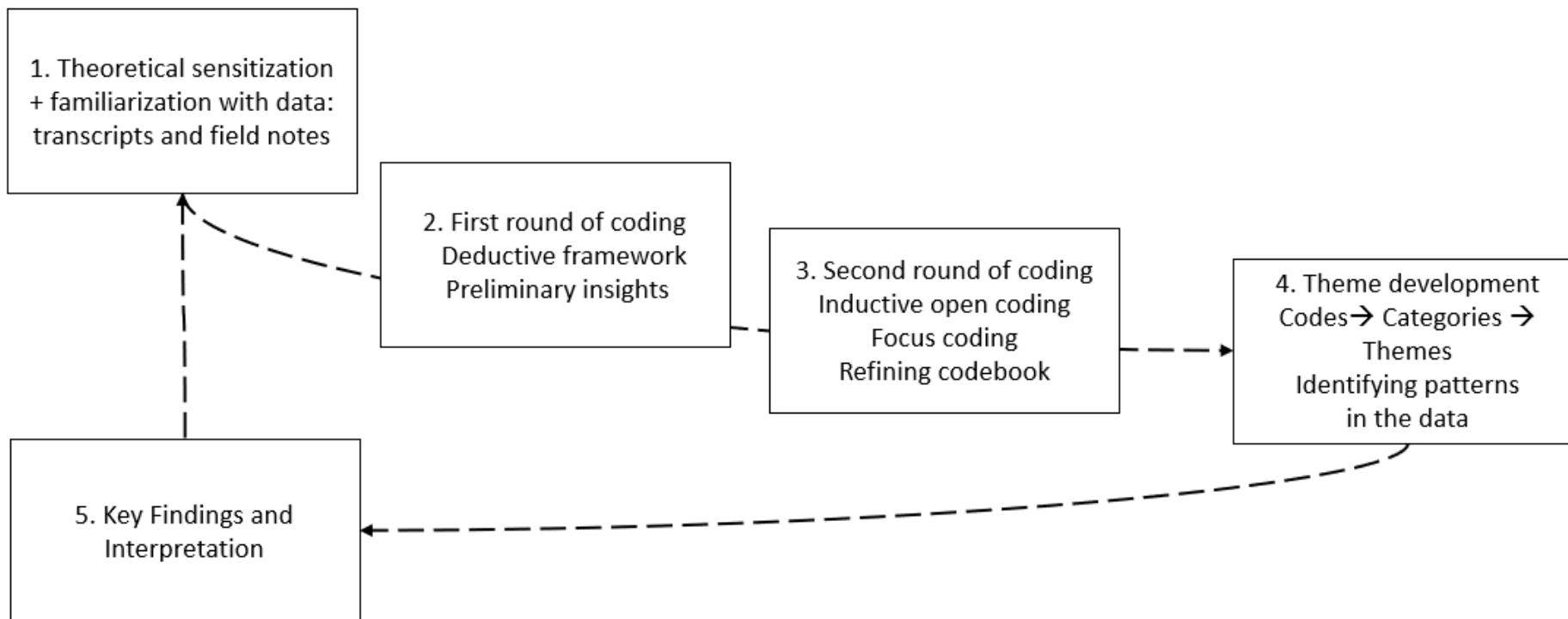
FGD with TMRI beneficiaries in Khulna



VGD beneficiaries waiting to take home 30 Kgs of rice at a Union Parishad office in Bagerhat

Methodology

District	Upazila	Village	Instrument	Interviews with Women (18)	Interviews with Men (12)
Khulna	<u>Dacope</u>	<u>Khatail</u> <u>Tildanga</u>	FGD (2) Interviews (10)	6	4
Bagerhat	<u>Fakirhat</u>	<u>Jaria Maitkumra</u>	FGD (2) Interviews (11)	7	4
Patuakhali	<u>Bauphal</u>	<u>Gosinga</u>	FGD (2) Interviews (9)	5	4



Interviewing husband of a TMRI beneficiary (Food + BCC)

Key Results

Social protection benefits (cash and food + BCC) support shorter-term coping capacity in the face of rapid onset climatic impacts and overlapping shocks like COVID-19.

Receiving food transfer helped families survive immediate aftermath of cyclones.

Food + training on nutrition and sanitation also helped cope during storms and floods, as well as during COVID-19 pandemic.

“ We somehow manage. Sometimes we eat dry foods during disaster time. Also, we always try to make some savings before a disaster, so that we can manage those days...I: When you used to get the food relief, was that a help during disasters? R: Yeah. We had received the training during a storm time too...That was a huge help then. *(TMRI beneficiary, Bagerhat)*

Time *during* which food transfers received → coping and overall well-being

When storms coincided with receiving other kinds of support, not having food impacted women beneficiaries.

“ It is the time when there is a storm and rain. I was in trouble. I could not eat, I could not cook. There was no rice in the house. *(VGD beneficiary, Bagerhat)*

Key Results

SP benefits have the potential to support longer term adaptive capacity.

Cash saved from recurring transfers invested in agriculture and livestock, along with expenses for healthcare and children's education.

Money saved from not buying food used for loan repayment and acquiring assets.

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“As we were getting the food as relief, so I get to save some money in those two years. From that savings I've bought a calf” (*Husband of TMRI beneficiary, Bagerhat*)

“I spent the money following my husband's direction. I gave him some money to plant some paddy, he cultivated some.” (*TMRI beneficiary, Khulna*)

“...we had debt, and we could pay it off... We were relieved after getting the food” (*TMRI beneficiary, Patuakhali*)

“...if we can save two taka for this rice, then we will benefit a little” (*VGD beneficiary, Patuakhali*)

Longer-term spillover effects and planning for future

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“I have a dream to buy some cow if I get some money. Then If I can make some accumulation than I will buy some land, cultivate paddy and live my life. This is my hope. If life goes on in this way, it would be livable.” (*FGD participant, Khulna*)

Key Results

After SP program ends, longer term pathways supporting adaptive capacity could be interrupted.

Challenging to maintain climate-sensitive livelihood trajectories.

“R: I harvested paddy...We brought it home and ate the rice. We didn't have to buy rice. My husband worked and we repaid the money with his income...
I: But didn't you keep that paddy field after that?
R: No, we couldn't harvest that land anymore. I mean we did not get enough cash again so we couldn't do it further” (TMRI beneficiary, Khulna)

“Suppose I took a loan from someone and cultivated the land. Now, if saltwater comes to that field where I spent thirty thousand takas. If we can't get to the root of it, then the whole thing will be lost. Then I will be carrying the loan” (FGD participant, Khulna)

Truncated pathways → Dependence on credit → debt cycle

Concerns for livestock and other assets can affect capacity to prepare for shocks, like going to a cyclone shelter.

“We don't go because everyone has more or less cows, goats, chickens, or a lot of other goods in the family. How will we go there by leaving them?” (TMRI beneficiary, Patuakhali)

“If we leave the house, who will see if our roof flies?” (VGD beneficiary, Khulna)

Discussion

SP and complementary program design for future interventions in the region could consider the following to better address needs and challenges:

Timing and delivery: cash transfers preferred as one-time support, to invest in livestock and other assets.

Skill based training + assets for longer term livelihood support and diversification: e.g., tailoring (training) + sewing machine (asset); CSA practices (training) + support for leasing/buying land (asset).

Infrastructural support: e.g., water tank, tube well, cyclone shelter.

“ I would buy a tank if I had the ability. Now a water tank will cost at least six to seven thousand taka. Now, if I could buy a tank, I would be free from the disease. (FGD participant, Khulna)



Water tank received as aid by a TMRI beneficiary in Khulna
Photo credit: Tanaya DuttaGupta



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From providing transfers to supporting trajectories

Graduation out of program:

- Transition period → from reactive to anticipatory capacity
- Leverage community networks, relations, support systems

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“At one time, we saw this place on the bank of the canal. After hearing that everything was floating, we took the food and went to see it. Because they are so poor, they can't cook or do anything. All the places filled with water, water and water” (*TMRI beneficiary, Khulna*)

“...if people live side by side, of course, one sees the other” (*Husband of VGD beneficiary, Patuakhali*)

“We don't send back anyone. Whoever comes, we give them water. We don't return anyone back” (*TMRI beneficiary, Khulna, who received a water tank from another program*)



References

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Thank you!

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