PARIBARTAN

Event Report on Local Level Stakeholders' Dialogue on Locally Led Climate Adaptation and Unlocking Business Opportunities in Polder Areas

| 15th May 2025, Botiaghata Upazila, Khulna || 26th May 2025, Amtali Upazila, Barguna |

Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research | Australian Aid | CIMMYT | ICCCAD International Centre for Climate Change and Development | সুশীলন Shushilan

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) sincerely thanks all participants of the local stakeholders' dialogues held in Amtali (Barguna) and Botiaghata (Khulna). This publication consolidates the outcomes of the discussions.

We extend our deepest gratitude to the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR), the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), and Shushilan for their invaluable support. Special appreciation goes to all dialogue participants for their insightful contributions.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Local Level Stakeholders' Dialogue on Locally Led Climate Adaptation and Unlocking Business Opportunities in Polder Areas was organized under the PARIBARTAN Project (*Participatory Action Research on Locally-led Iterative Learning and Inclusive Business Models for Adaptive Transformation in Bangladesh Polders)*. Held on 15th May 2025 in Botiaghata Upazila, Khulna, and 26th May 2025 in Amtali Upazila, Barguna, the dialogues were jointly facilitated by the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), and Shushilan, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).

The dialogues aimed to introduce PARIBARTAN's core concepts and goals to key community stakeholders while integrating their feedback into the project design. A central focus was strengthening collaboration between local government institutions and Water Management Groups (WMGs) to ensure sustainable and inclusive outcomes. Prominent participants, including representatives from key government organizations such as Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), Department of Fisheries (DoF), Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MoWA), Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), and local Union Parishads of both areas attended the dialogues. The Botiaghata dialogue was graced by Hosne Ara Tanni, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO), Botiaghata Upazila, as the special guest, while the Amtali event was attended by Tarek Hasan, Assistant Commissioner (Land), Upazila Land Office, Amtali, as the special guest.

Both dialogues included segments ranging from presentations on key components to comprehensive individual activities, all with a strong focus on enhancing the well-being and participation of WMGs. The sessions introduced the project's innovative approaches, including transforming WMGs into sustainable "boundary organizations," establishing a peer-to-peer "Living Library" for knowledge sharing, and developing income-generating business models to ensure WMG viability beyond the project lifespan. Key challenges emerged from both locations, such as salinity intrusion in Khulna and sluice gate management conflicts in Barguna, with stakeholders emphasizing the need for farmer-led water governance, youth engagement, and gender-inclusive participation. Constructive recommendations included forming multi-stakeholder advisory groups, conducting Political Economy Analysis to address power dynamics, and providing targeted training programs. The dialogues concluded with commitments to establish WhatsApp groups for continuous communication and hold quarterly review meetings, setting the stage for participatory implementation of climate-resilient solutions tailored to each polder's unique needs while ensuring long-term sustainability through strengthened local partnerships.

ACRONYMS

ACIAR	Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research
BARI	Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute
BADC	Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation
BRDB	Bangladesh Rural Development Board
BRRI	Bangladesh Rice Research Institute
BWDB	Bangladesh Water Development Board
CIMMYT	International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center
CSISA-MEA	Cereal Systems Initiative for South Asia - Mechanization and Extension Activity
DoF	Department of Fisheries
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
ICCCAD	International Centre for Climate Change and Development
LGED	Local Government Engineering Department
LLA	Locally-Led Adaptation
MAC	Multi-stakeholder Advisory Group
MoWA	Ministry of Women's Affairs
WMG	Water Management Group
UNO	Upazila Nirbahi Officer

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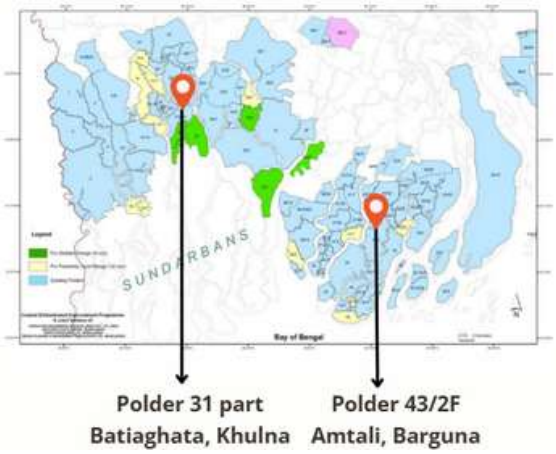
Project Overview

PARIBARTAN, "**Participatory Action Research on Locally-led Iterative Learning and Inclusive Business Models for Adaptive Transformation in Bangladesh Polders,**" is a research project that seeks to enhance farmers' capacity to adapt to changing conditions. This will be achieved through processes and tools that support individual and collective farmer decision-making about potential adaptation options (and social business models), while enabling farmers to trial and test these options. It also facilitates stakeholder engagement for knowledge sharing and resource access. A variety of guides will be produced to share and scale up the processes and tools used in this project. This initiative also seeks to enhance stakeholder capacity to support farmers and farming communities by helping relevant stakeholders become more 'engageable'.

Dr. T. S. Amjath Babu, Project Lead at the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), emphasized that the project is guided by the eight principles of Locally-Led Adaptation (LLA) and is focused on establishing sustainable networks for the dissemination and sharing of agricultural technologies. A key innovation under the project is the introduction of a business model designed to generate operational funds for Water Management Groups (WMGs). This model is intended to ensure the long-term sustainability of WMG activities beyond the project's duration.

Project Location



Event Background

The local-level stakeholders' dialogue includes segments ranging from presentations on key components to comprehensive individual activities, all with a strong focus on enhancing the well-being and participation of WMGs. Participants included representatives from key government organizations such as Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB), Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC), Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI), Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB), Department of Fisheries (DoF), Ministry of Women and Children's Affairs (MoWCA), Local Government Engineering Department (LGED), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), and local Union Parishads of both areas.

Objectives

1. Introducing the key components of the project
2. Gather feedback from local stakeholders to incorporate in the project for a better outcome
3. Strengthen collaboration between local governments and WMGs.

Principles of LLA

Ms. Farhin Rahman Reeda, Project Focal, International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), provided a clear and simplified explanation of the eight Locally-Led Adaptation (LLA) principles to make them more accessible to local stakeholders. She also facilitated an interactive discussion, encouraging participants to provide feedback and share their views on the proposed adaptation strategies.

Water Management Organizations

Dr. Sharmin Afroz, Consultant at CIMMYT, delivered an in-depth presentation on the structure and formation of WMGs, emphasizing that their establishment follows the Participatory Water Management Guidelines set by the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB). She underscored the importance of ensuring at least one-third female representation within WMGs, citing past experiences where such inclusion significantly improved agricultural outcomes through better water resource management.

However, Dr. Sharmin noted a critical challenge: many WMGs become inactive once a project ends due to the lack of continued funding. To address this, the PARIBARTAN project aims to introduce a sustainable business model that will financially support ongoing WMG activities after the project's completion.

Key Components and Strategies

Boundary Organizations

Dr. Amjath highlighted the main vision of the project: transforming WMGs into boundary organizations that will act as a medium between farmers and various stakeholders. Currently, WMGs are either dormant or only active with basic water management functions. The envisioned transition involves gradually strengthening their capabilities, beginning with efficient water management and progressing to more complex roles. These roles include aggregating information, monitoring and evaluation, understanding adaptation needs, prioritizing and conducting technology trials, and navigating political-economic constraints. Ultimately, WMGs are expected to function like social enterprises, sustaining operations and innovation through a business model. While also ensuring the inclusion of women and marginalized farmers in adaptive changes.

Living Library

Dr. Amjath introduced the project's innovative approach called the "Living Library," designed to facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge sharing among farmers. This concept recognizes the spatial variations in soil types and salinity levels across regions, necessitating location-specific adaptation technologies.

Mr. Mahanambrota Das, Head of Research at Shushilan, explained the Living Library concept in the local language, making it accessible and meaningful to all participants. Farmers are metaphorically referred to as "chapters" in this library, where successful adaptation strategies are shared and replicated within communities. WMGs play a crucial role in managing these knowledge exchanges and maintaining records of effective practices.

Sustainable Social Business Models and Seed Funding

A new concept for the project: sustainable social business models, which will be selected by the WMGs. The project proposes providing a one-time seed fund to selected WMGs, which could be utilized for various income-generating activities such as cultivating fallow lands, engaging in value chain businesses, or collective savings schemes. The revenue generated would primarily support sluice gate maintenance and other WMG operational expenses.

Political Economy Analysis

Dr. Sharmin also addressed the political-economic analysis, which is a method used to understand how political, economic, and social factors of a particular region influence decision-making, power dynamics, and development outcomes by utilizing their resources. This analysis helps to understand why a project may or may not function successfully in a specific region. A local community may comprise multiple stakeholders, including influential leaders and affluent farmers, and may enforce specific regulations for women. Political economy analysis examines how resource allocation reflects the behavior and interactions of the upper class toward more vulnerable farming groups. Dr. Sharmin emphasized that any proposed business models must consider these local power dynamics to ensure equitable benefits for all community members.

Multi-Stakeholder Advisory (MAC) Committee

Ms. Bushra Anjum, Research Assistant, ICCCAD, discussed the importance of a multi-stakeholder advisory committee (MAC) to implement adaptation strategies as required by the farmers. This committee will be formed both locally and nationally. The role of MAC members will be to help in decision-making, observing whether the objective of the project is aligned with the goal or not, and giving suggestions from their experience, so that the local farmers can get context-specific solutions.

The purpose of a multi-stakeholder advisory committee is to build a diverse network of stakeholders, strengthen the capacity of WMGs, develop sustainable business models, establish a system for sharing adaptation knowledge, and ensure inclusive participation of all community members, including women, youth, and marginalized groups.

Selection Process of Water Management Groups

Ms. Jannat Ara Shifa, Gender Analyst, ICCCAD, outlined the meticulous process used to select WMGs for the project. Through interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions (FGDs), 30 WMGs from Polder 31 in Batiaghata, Khulna, and Polder 43/2F in Amtali, Barguna were evaluated based on criteria such as activity status of WMGs, gender and youth representation, adaptive capacity, power dynamics, leadership structure, and willingness to collaborate.

Each criterion was assigned a specific weight based on its level of importance, with more critical factors receiving higher weightage than others, to ensure a balanced selection. From this pool, 12 WMGs were chosen, representing a mix of high, middle, and low performers to foster diversity and inclusive learning.

The goal is to create a network among these WMGs so they can help each other with capacity building. She ended by asking all stakeholders if they had any questions or suggestions about the selection process.

Challenges Identified

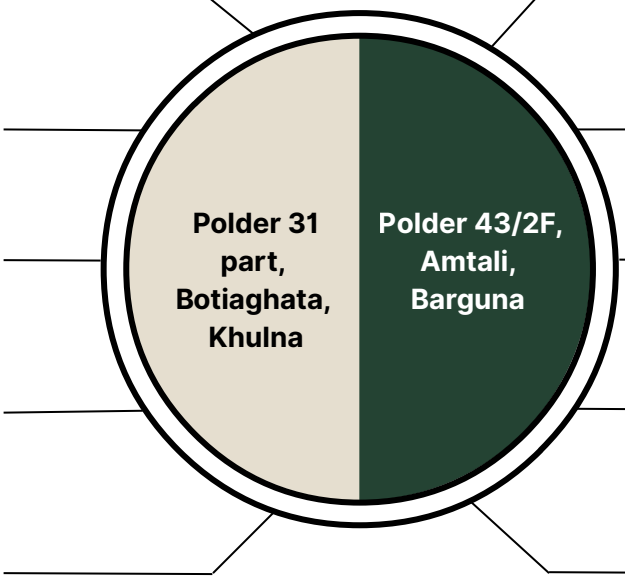
Poor coordination between organizations like BWDB and BADC, particularly in sluice gate maintenance

Shurkhali Union relies heavily on rainwater for irrigation.

No available technology to address soil salinity issues.

WMGs often become inactive after project funding ends due to a dependency mindset

***'Need for embankments, canal re-excavation, and road development',* was quoted by Runa Begom from Union Parishad.**



'Lack of clarity on the project's exact catchment area', was quoted by Idres Ali, LGED

Questions were raised about disaster response measures under the project

Female farmers face disputes due to uncoordinated sluice gate operations.

WMGs are currently non-functional, with no regular meetings being held.

Elderly farmers need knowledge and support to adapt to new practices.

SOLUTIONS

- Training young WMG members (under the age of 35) in farming and livestock management was mentioned by Md. Abubakar Mollah, Department of Youth Development.
- Concern was expressed regarding the need for proper monitoring to prevent fund misuse, and the exploration of rainwater harvesting was suggested as an alternative to silt-laden river water for irrigation, by Md. Saidur Rahman, Sub-Assistant Engineer at the Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB).

- A proposal for reactivating WMGs, emphasizing that it should be a priority, was made by Md. Firoj Alam of the Bangladesh Rural Development Board (BRDB).
- Having regular WMG meetings to ensure engagement was emphasized by Rasel Ahmed, Upazila Agriculture Officer.
- Land zoning by elevation (crops vs. aquaculture) to reduce water disputes.
- Linking the sluice gate committees with local farmers for better coordination.
- Utilizing trained youth in social business models was underscored by Milone Chandra, Youth Development Officer.
- Conducting region-wise FGDs to identify location-specific issues and viable business models was mentioned by Female Union Parishad Members.
- Provide targeted training and support to older farmers adapting to new practices.

Stakeholder Feedback

A set of 11 questions was presented to the participants, and they were handed a piece of chart paper, upon which they were requested to leave their answers, along with any suggestions and/or feedback. These were later collected by the project team and displayed on the walls to form a colourful display.

QUESTIONS	POLDER 31 PART	POLDER 43/2F
Q.1. Do you think any of your projects or programs have similar goals to the PARIBARTAN project in the proposed area? Are you seeing any aligned activities?	All the participants mentioned that no similar projects or activities were being held in their area, like PARIBARTAN. One of the participants noted that CIMMYT BD is implementing a project in polder-31 part, called 'CSISA-MEA' and under SF CIMMYT, different fertilizers and cropping system activities are also being implemented.	Most participants didn't respond, which suggests that there are no similar ongoing projects in the area. Md. Idres Ali mentioned that if he had more information about the catchment area, he could help ensure that no overlapping projects take place.
Q.2. Do you see any risks in the proposed activities of the PARIBARTAN? If yes, what changes do you think are appropriate for the project?	Abul Kalam Hawladar, a Union Parishad member from Shurkhali Union, said there would be no problem in implementing the project in that area. However, he pointed out that their main issue is waterlogging during the monsoon season.	There should be no major problems as long as the project keeps close communication with the local community and the stakeholders
Q.3. Do you think that the sluice gate management can be improved for better agricultural outcomes? Do you have any previous experience sharing pilot programs on participatory sluice gate and canal management? Do you have any suggestions?	Most of the stakeholders responded that to improve the slice gate management, representatives from the farmer group should be selected. The sluice gates should be controlled by politically powerful people. Those representatives must ensure no saline water and high sedimented water can get into the canal system. It will improve the sustainability of the canal	It was mentioned by Md. Rasel, UAO that a sluice gate committee exists, but better coordination with farmers is needed for it to be more effective. A female Union Parishad member noted that conflicts arise when different groups require water simultaneously, with one group opening the gate and affecting others. A suggestion from the participants was that land be organized according to cropping patterns so farmers with similar irrigation needs can be grouped together.



QUESTIONS	POLDER 31 PART	POLDER 43/2F
Q.4. Do you think that the farmer group can take up activities that can generate funds required for testing new technologies, improving water management by enhancing communication among stakeholders, testing new market models, etc.	Very few respondents gave their insights into this question. The farmer group can take up activities that can generate funds.	No additional points were raised by participants, suggesting alignment with the discussion
Q.5. Do you have any suggestions on business activities that farmer groups can take up? Our idea is to support farming on lands that is fallow (eg, mungbean). Is there any program within your organization that can also provide seed funds for such experiments?	A participant from CIMMYT Bangladesh suggested increasing cropping intensity by utilizing fallow land after Aman rice harvest for maize cultivation. They also proposed surface seeding of mung bean immediately after Aman harvest without tillage to boost both cropping intensity and nutrient security. However, one respondent stated that their organization would not be able to provide any seed funding support.	No specific business ideas were suggested. However, it was mentioned that if WMG members are young people, the Department of Youth Development can offer training for various agricultural activities.
Q.6. How can we include the participation of women and marginalized farmers? Can you share any previous experiences that worked or failed?	Most members of the farmer groups live in poverty and must prioritize daily work to support their families. It limits their ability to actively engage in WMGs. Providing financial support could encourage their participation, while women's involvement can be strengthened through targeted motivation and awareness efforts	Most farmers in the area are older men. It is important to empower and support them.
Q.7. What are the risks in increasing inclusion in the project activities?	No additional points were raised by participants, suggesting alignment with the discussion	No additional points were raised by participants, suggesting alignment with the discussion

QUESTIONS	POLDER 31 PART	POLDER 43/2F
Q.8. How can we shift the mentality of farmers to entrepreneurship instead of passive recipients of the Govt. or non-Govt. assistance?	No additional points were raised by participants, suggesting alignment with the discussion	No additional points were raised by participants, suggesting alignment with the discussion
Q.9. Do you agree with the selection process of the WMGs? Do you have any suggestions?	They agreed with the selection process	They agreed with the selection process
Q.10. We want to build a platform where the stakeholders can discuss the project experiences (explaining the issues and successes of the project). What frequency would you like to meet with the project team? Once in 3 months, once in 6 months, or annually. We prefer 3 months	It seems the participants had no issues meeting with the project team once in 3 months.	No additional points were raised by participants, suggesting alignment with the discussion
Q.11. Can we make a WhatsApp group with the stakeholders present at this meeting?	These suggestions were well received, and no concerns were raised by the participants.	These suggestions were well received, and no concerns were raised by the participants.

Keynote Messages

Ms. Hosne Ara Tanni, Upazila Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Botiaghata Upazila, praised that the PARIBARTAN Project's vision aligns with their development priorities, but success demands focused action on critical local challenges: salinity intrusion, water scarcity, and fisheries community needs. To prevent resource conflicts and ensure sustainable solutions, she urged immediate implementation of targeted training programs for farmers and fishers. She also emphasized that together, we must transform water management into an inclusive, conflict-free system for lasting progress.

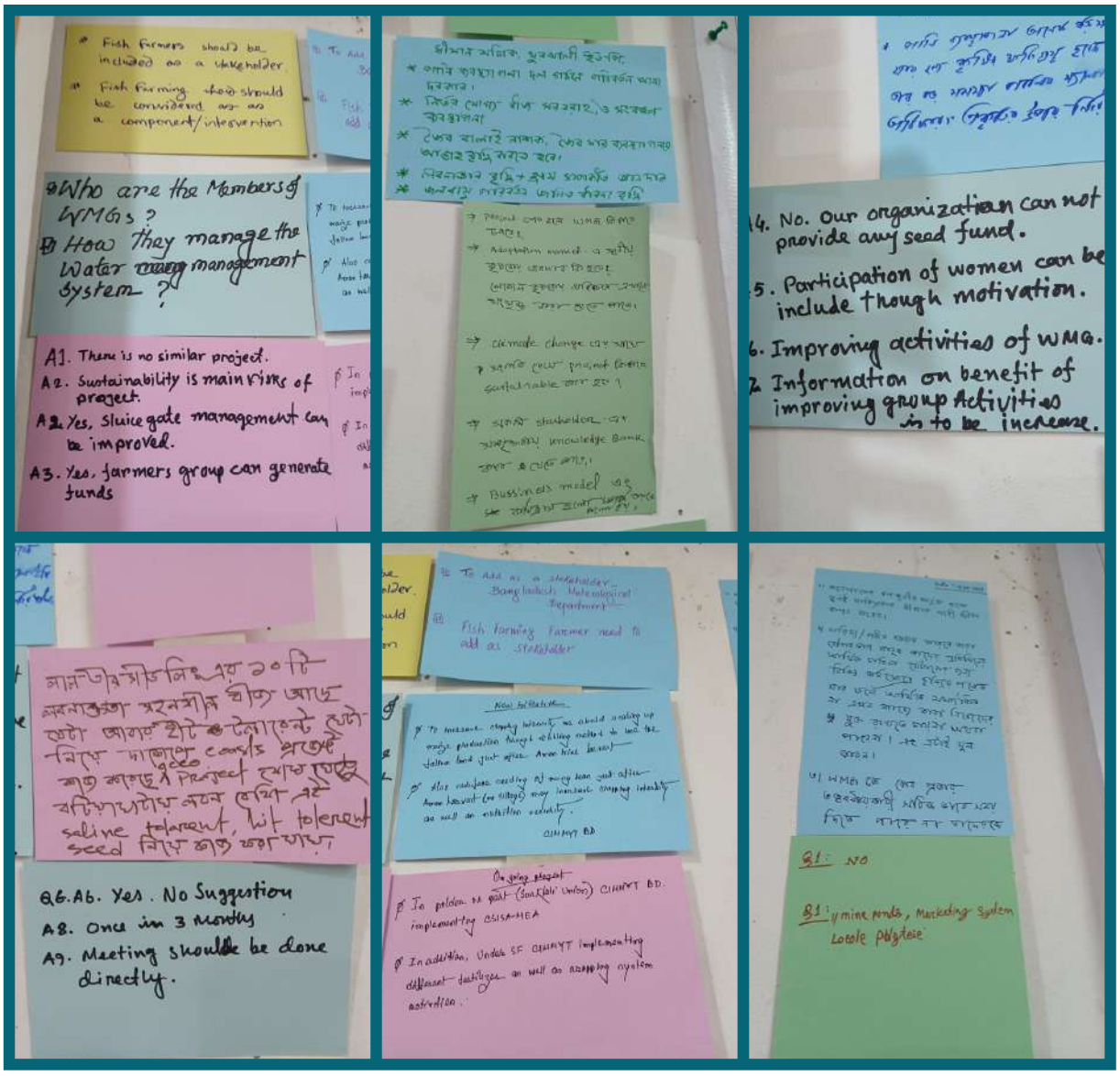
Mr. Tarek Hasan, Assistant Commissioner (Land) of Amtali Upazila, highlighted the PARIBARTAN Project as a crucial step forward, but its success hinges on united action. He further added that we must bridge research with real-world solutions by equipping farmers with climate-smart technologies while ending harmful practices like topsoil depletion. True progress demands empowering communities through knowledge, turning sustainable land use from concepts to common practice through stakeholder collaboration.

Closing Remarks

Dr. Amjath concluded the workshop by summarizing the key challenges raised by local stakeholders and outlining the next steps for the PARIBARTAN Project. He acknowledged valuable input from government representatives, Union Parishad members, and regional institutions. As an immediate step forward, the establishment of a WhatsApp group to facilitate ongoing communication and coordination among participants was announced.

Participatory research methods are used to ensure project strategies remain rooted in local contexts and can be adaptively refined based on community feedback. This people-centered approach is essential for developing sustainable, inclusive solutions that truly address the needs of polder communities. The PARIBARTAN Project looks forward to translating these discussions into concrete actions through our continued partnership with all stakeholders.

Annex 1: Individual Activity



For more information, visit the project webpage and scan the QR code: