

Brief Learning Report

Centering Community Voices through Peer Learning: Reflections from the Bay of Bengal Convening on Non- Economic Loss and Damage



Date: 18 – 20 August 2025
Sofia Hotel, Colombo, Sri Lanka

Acknowledgement

The successful Bay of Bengal Peer-to-Peer Learning Convening in Colombo (August 18–20, 2025) was made possible by the collective effort and generous support of many individuals and organizations.

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We sincerely thank all our implementing partners for their frontline contributions: Aaina, Earth Journalism Network (EJN), Human Rights Foundation (HRF), Jagrata Juba Shangha (JJS), Parittran, Prerona, and Shariatpur Development Society (SDS).

We are grateful to all participants for openly sharing their experiences, which grounded our discussions in real-world challenges and solutions.

Finally, we acknowledge the communities we serve. Their stories of loss, resilience, and adaptation are the heart of this convening, and we remain committed to ensuring their voices are heard and integrated into global climate justice action.

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Executive Summery

This report focuses on a brief discussion on the key outcomes of the Bay of Bengal Learning Convening on Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD), held from August 18–20, 2025, in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The convening brought together over 25 participants from seven grassroots organizations, the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), the Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF), and independent consultants to build a shared understanding of NELD, foster peer learning, and co-create strategies to center community voices in climate policy.

Through participatory methods including storytelling, NELD mapping, and Gender Power Walks, participants affirmed that the most profound climate impacts in the region are non-economic: severe mental health trauma, loss of cultural heritage and indigenous knowledge, forced displacement, and erosion of identity and social cohesion. A critical insight was that the distinction between economic and non-economic loss is often unhelpful, as these impacts are deeply interconnected in lived experience.

Key Challenges Identified:

- Invisibility of NELD, which is stigmatized, hard to quantify, and overlooked in policy.
- Systemic policy gaps in national and international frameworks, including the Loss and Damage Fund, which lack mechanisms to address NELD.
- Structural inequalities such as patriarchy, caste discrimination, and power imbalances—that silence marginalized voices.
- Donor constraints and rigid project cycles hinder authentic community engagement and long-term healing.

The following approaches were highlighted throughout the discussion for a clear, collective vision for accelerating action:

- Community-Led Action: Shift from consultation to co-creation, centering communities as knowledge holders and leaders of their own recovery.



- Gender-Transformative Approaches: Address root causes of inequality by redistributing power and supporting women and marginalized groups as decision-makers.
- Holistic Support: Integrate mental health, cultural preservation, and psychosocial care as core components of climate resilience.
- Accessible Finance: Ensure flexible, long-term, and trust-based funding reaches grassroots actors without bureaucratic barriers.
- Strategic Advocacy: Build unified, evidence-based advocacy coalitions to hold institutions accountable for addressing NELD.


The convening demonstrated that a just pathway forward exists through collaborative, community-centered approaches. The detailed discussion in this report provides a blueprint for governments, funders, and civil society to ensure that the full human cost of the climate crisis is recognized and integrated into global action.



1. Introduction and Context

The Bay of Bengal region stands on the front lines of the climate crisis, experiencing a relentless escalation of cyclones, floods, river erosion, and sea-level rise. While the economic costs of these disasters are increasingly documented, a deeper and more insidious crisis continues to unfold beneath the surface through Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD). NELD refers to the intangible yet profound losses that disrupt the very fabric of community life: the loss of loved ones and health, of cultural heritage and ancestral lands, of language, identity, and connection to place. These are not losses that can be rebuilt or compensated through money; they represent ruptures in meaning, belonging, and dignity. Grounded in the understanding that the climate crisis is deeply shaped by colonial, patriarchal, and extractive systems, the initiative of 'Participatory grantmaking to address Non Economic Loss and Damage' emerged as a deliberate effort to address Loss and Damage—especially the non-economic and unquantifiable losses that have long been rendered invisible in global responses. This collaborative project, funded by the Scottish Government and the Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF) and led by the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) as the Global Learning Partner, aims to deepen the understanding of NELD and support community-led actions across the Bay of Bengal, East Africa, and the Pacific through 25 targeted grants. The Regional Learning Partners are SouthSouthNorth (SSN) for the East Africa region, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) and Pacific Climate Warriors for the Pacific Region, and ICCCAD for the Bay of Bengal Region.

The Bay of Bengal Learning Convening on Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD) brought together over 25 participants from seven grassroots organizations across the Bay of Bengal (Bangladesh and India), facilitated by International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) as the Global Learning Partner, along with the Climate Justice Resilience Fund (CJRF), and independent consultants.



Held from 18–20 August 2025 in Colombo, Sri Lanka, the convening aimed to:

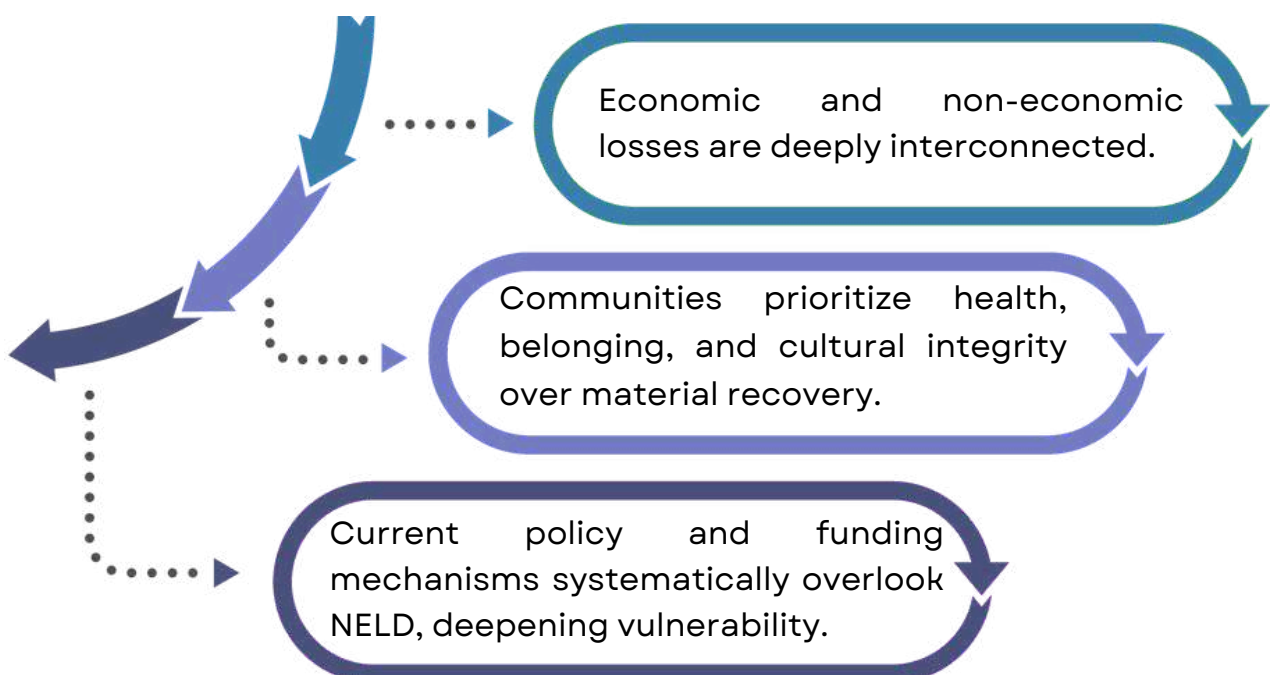
- Build a shared understanding of NELD and gender intersectionality.
- Facilitate peer exchange of challenges and solutions in NELD interventions.
- Co-create actionable strategies for inclusive, community-led approaches.

The convening confirmed that NELD losses, such as mental health trauma, cultural erosion, displacement, and loss of identity, represent the most profound yet least addressed dimension of the climate crisis in the region.

2. Key Outcomes and Insights

2.1 NELD is Central to Climate Justice:

Participants affirmed that NELD is not a peripheral issue but the moral and emotional core of climate impacts. The convening highlighted that:



2.2 Community Voices as Evidence

Storytelling and participatory mapping transformed lived experiences into valid forms of evidence. Key themes from community stories included:

- Displacement as loss of identity (e.g., Momtaz Begum's story from Barguna, Khulna).
- Gendered dimensions of loss women face include increased GBV, economic dependence, and mental stress.
- Cultural erosion, such as loss of sacred sites, traditions, and indigenous knowledge.
- Mental health crises, specifically widespread trauma, anxiety, and depression, remain unaddressed.

2.3. Participatory Analysis Revealed Compounding Losses

Using tools like the Historical Transect and Loss & Damage Prioritization, participants mapped how NELD compounds over time:



Time Period	Key NELD Manifestations
0-5 Years	GBV, Child Marriage, Displacement, Anxiety
6-10 Years	Loss of Livelihoods, Family Separation, Community Distrust
11-15 Years	Cultural Dislocation, Youth Alienation, Chronic Mental Distress
16-20 Years	Entrenched Trauma, Normalized Loss, Institutional Fatigue

Losses are cumulative and intergenerational, yet policy cycles are too short to address them.



2.4. Gender and Intersectionality Are Non-Negotiable

The Power Walk exercise visually demonstrated how power, caste, gender, and ethnicity determine whose voices are heard. The convening called for a shift from gender-responsive to gender-transformative approaches that:

- Redistribute decision-making power.
- Address root causes of inequality (patriarchy, casteism, economic exclusion).
- Center women, Dalits, Indigenous peoples, and persons with disabilities in recovery processes.

2.5. Community-Led Responses Are Already Emerging

Grassroots partners showcased innovative, context-specific interventions:

- SDS: Trained 180 community members as mental health first responders.
- Parittran: Used community scorecards to address GBV and SRHR.
- JJS: Established Living Labs for urban migrants to co-design solutions.
- Prerona: Documented Munda cultural heritage to combat erosion.
- HRF: Mobilized single women's networks for welfare access and advocacy.
- EJN: Built journalist capacity to report on NELD.
- Aaina: Conducted participatory research to advocate dignified rehabilitation.

PARTNERS



Aaina

Aaina will co-create community-led evidence on non-economic loss and damage from coastal displacement to advocate for a just and inclusive state rehabilitation policy.

HRF

THRF aims to identify and support women and youth's psycho-social needs arising from climate impacts and displacement through "solidarity forums".

Earth Journalism Network

EJN is building the capacity of citizen journalists in India and Bangladesh to spotlight NELD impacts and solutions through powerful storytelling.

Jagrata Juba Shangha

Establishing youth-led and women-led "living labs" in rural and urban areas to center the voices of affected populations in socio-economic development, decision-making, and advocacy.

Parittran

support Dalit communities facing climate change by tackling gender-based violence, enhancing women and girls' wellbeing, and fostering social cohesion.

Prerona

Co-create and document women's cultural heritage in the Sundarbans to preserve identity and strengthen climate resilience for future generations.

SDS

Address NELD in Char communities through mental health support, cultural preservation, and gender-based violence prevention.



2.6. Barriers to Addressing NELD

Participants identified systemic barriers:

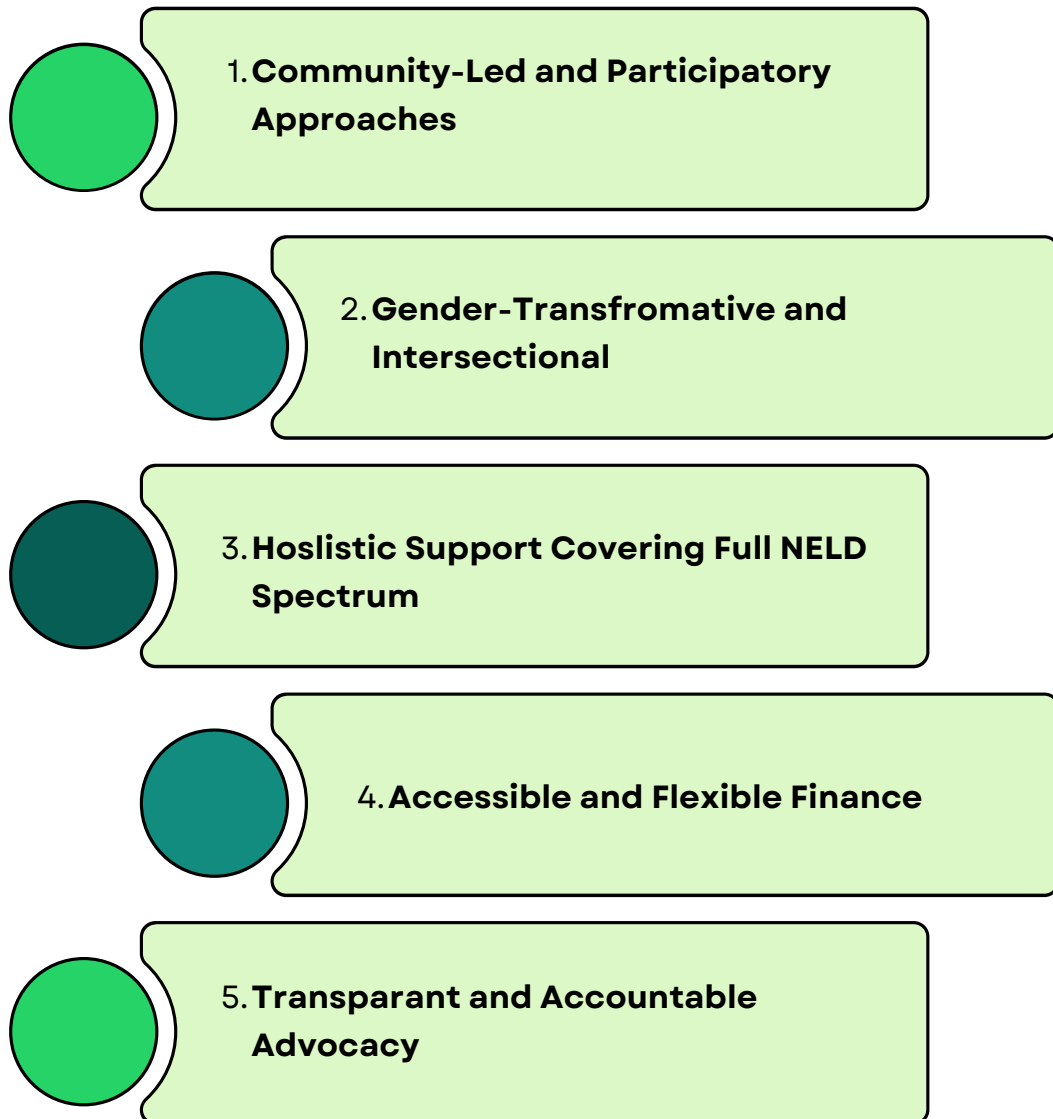
- Measurement gaps: NELD is stigmatized, qualitative, and hard to quantify.
- Policy gaps: National frameworks often overlook the psychosocial and cultural dimensions.
- Funding gaps: Short-term, rigid grants fail to support long-term healing.
- Structural exclusion: Patriarchy, caste, and corruption silence marginalized voices.

2.7. Pathways for Effective Advocacy

A role-play simulation revealed that advocacy must blend moral legitimacy with strategic diplomacy. Effective strategies include:

- Building coalitions (e.g., BoB Alliance) for collective voice.
- Using data + storytelling to humanize NELD.
- Framing NELD as an opportunity for co-benefits (e.g., social stability, donor alignment).
- Negotiating incrementally (e.g., joint committees, pilot programs).

3. A Framework for Accelerating Action on NELD



1. Community-Led and Participatory Approaches

- Shift from consultation to co-creation and community ownership.
- Use participatory tools: Living Labs, storytelling, needs assessments.
- Ensure communities define recovery and drive monitoring.

2. Gender-Transformative and Intersectional

- Move beyond gender mainstreaming to transform power relations.
- Integrate intersectional analysis into all program cycles.
- Support women and marginalized groups as leaders and knowledge holders.

3. Holistic Support Covering Full NELD Spectrum

- Integrate mental health support, cultural preservation, and psychosocial care into climate action.
- Recognize biodiversity loss and ecological grief as integral to well-being.
- Address intergenerational trauma and identity erosion.

4. Accessible and Flexible Finance

- Provide long-term, flexible grants that trust local decision-making.
- Simplify application and reporting for grassroots organizations.
- Ensure funding reaches the most marginalized (Indigenous, Dalits, PwDs, migrants).

5. Transparent and Accountable Advocacy

- Build multi-level coalitions to influence policy (local → global).
- Use community-gathered evidence to hold institutions accountable.
- Link global commitments (e.g., Loss and Damage Fund) to local delivery.

4. Recommendations

For Governments:

- Integrate NELD indicators into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs) and disaster policies.
- Create dedicated funding for mental health, cultural preservation, and community-led assessments.
- Mandate participatory loss and damage assessments to inform policy.

For Donors:

- Offer flexible, multi-year grants aligned with community priorities.
- Simplify access for grassroots and women-led organizations.
- Fund capacity building in intersectional analysis, psychosocial support, and advocacy.



For Civil Society Organizations: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Institutionalize gender-transformative and participatory approaches.- Strengthen advocacy coalitions for unified messaging.- Use community evidence to demand accountability from states and donors.	For Global Processes (COP30, Loss and Damage Fund): <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Ensure NELD is a central pillar of the Loss and Damage Fund.- Establish direct access mechanisms for affected communities.- Develop context-specific methodologies for assessing and valuing NELD.
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5. Conclusion

The Bay of Bengal Learning Convening confirmed that addressing NELD is both a technical and moral imperative. The journey forward requires:

- Centering community knowledge in climate action.
- Transforming systems that perpetuate inequality.
- Investing in healing, culture, and dignity as pillars of resilience.
- Building solidarity across borders to scale NELD justice globally.

The outcomes of this convening will inform the broader Global Learning Initiative on NELD, shaping actions in South Asia, East Africa, and the Pacific. The call is clear: move from compensating loss to cultivating restoration, and from project-based interventions to long-term, relational justice.

