

A photograph of a coastal village with thatched-roof houses and trees along a body of water. The scene is overcast and the water is calm.

Disaster and women

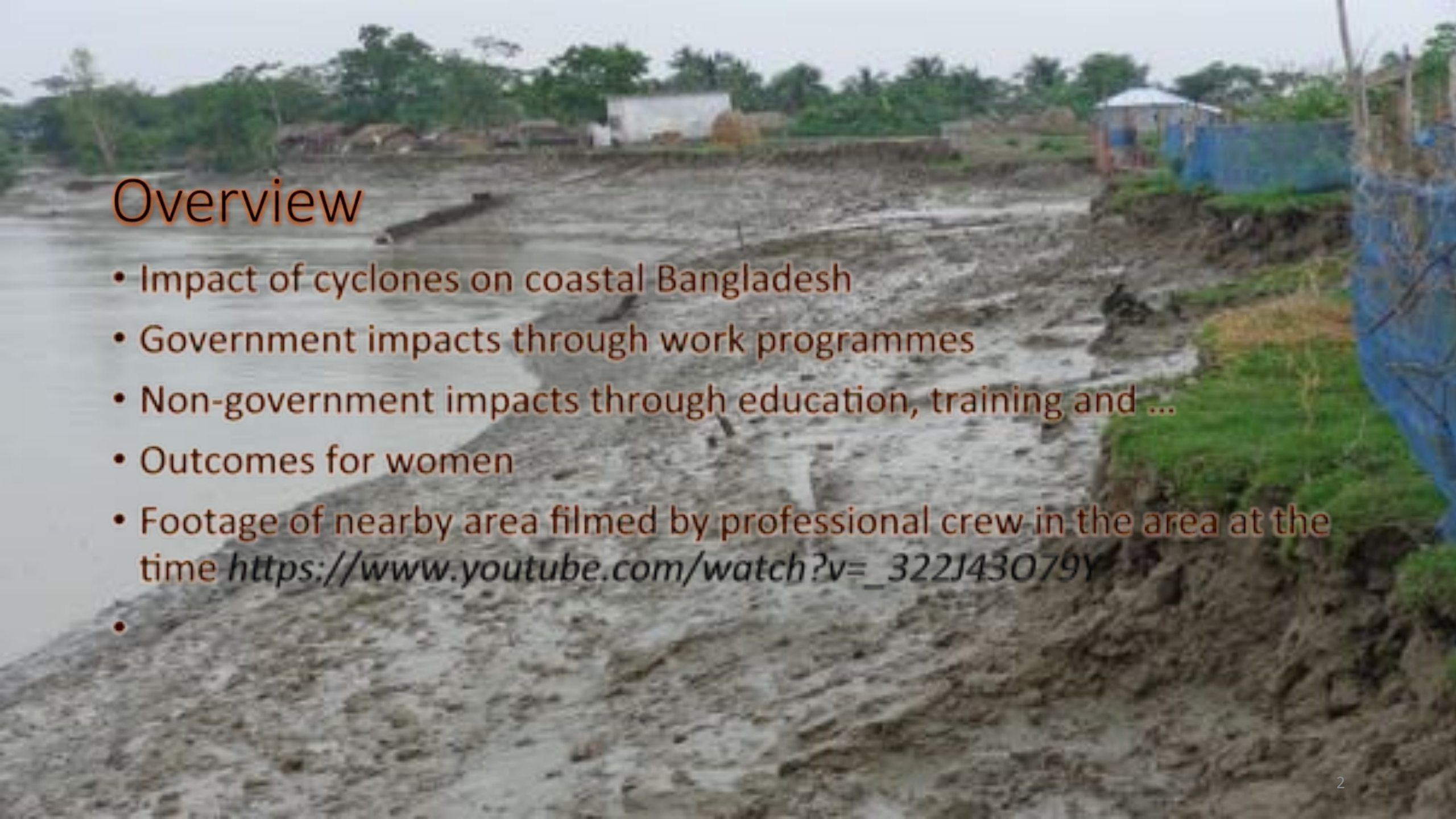
The changing position of women in coastal Bangladesh

Mohammed Khan and Alison Loveridge

Sociology and Anthropology

University of Canterbury

Devnet 2018



Overview

- Impact of cyclones on coastal Bangladesh
- Government impacts through work programmes
- Non-government impacts through education, training and ...
- Outcomes for women
- Footage of nearby area filmed by professional crew in the area at the time https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_322J43079Y

Cyclone shelters & embankments provide safety



- An embankment with latrine, vulnerable to flooding and harassment
- Photo: Mohammed Khan

With each cyclone, the civil defence system improves but it is still traumatic

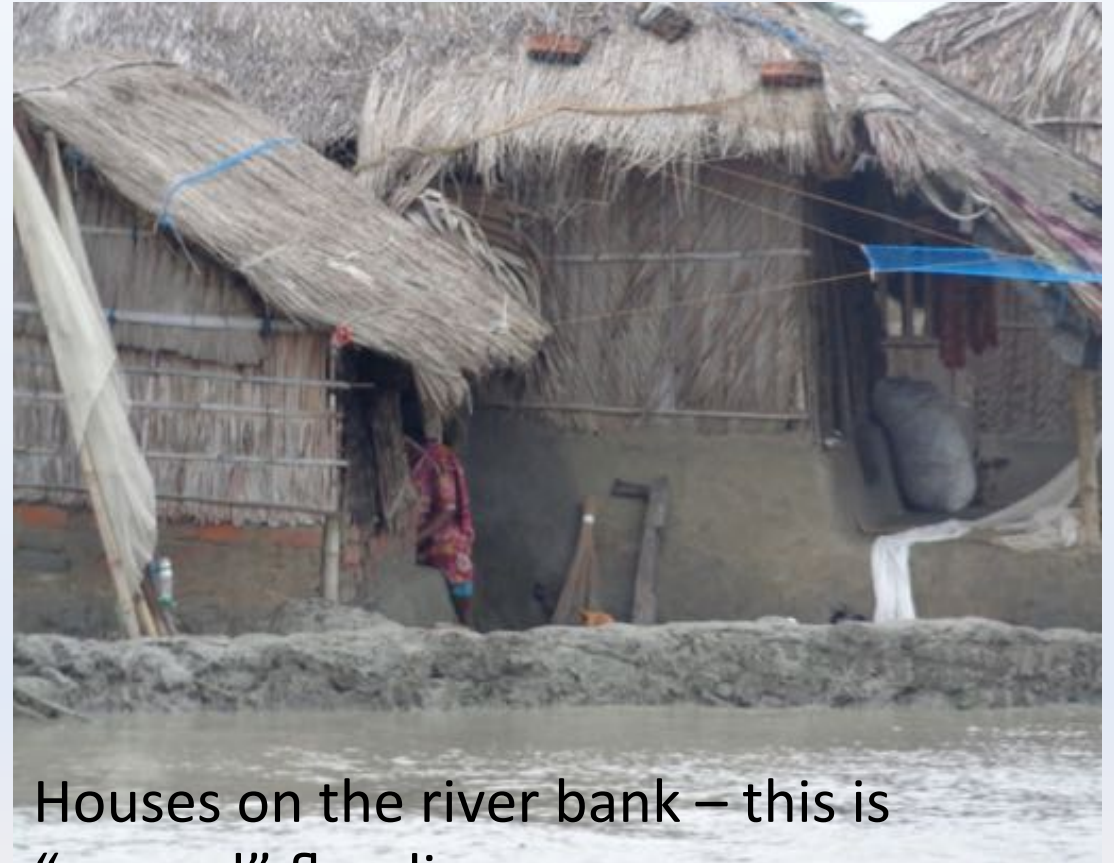
- *The sufferings of the people in the cyclone centre and wabda was indescribable. We had no preparation ... people on the wabda were under open sky. Everywhere people were frightened and uncertain. All around it was terrible, particularly at night. People were thinking only about their lives not properties.*
 - Male, 50, class X, FGD with PIC members.



http://giffb.blogspot.com/2009/05/cyclone-aila-that-hit-bangladesh_25.html

The effects stay with people a long time

- *To speak about the experience and memory in disastrous time I still feel scared and I feel that I could get a heart attack. More than 100 people took shelter in the house of my uncle-in-law. The children were almost gone with the current of the water, I just had been able to save them but I could not save my cattle. The trees were washed away.*
 - Female, 39, can sign only, FGD with female-headed households.



Houses on the river bank – this is “normal” flooding.

Photo: Mohammed Khan

Sutarkhali and Kali Nagor

- *The number of poor people in this community is too big. The majority of the people belong to the hand to mouth category. They do not have any savings to depend on. They take a loan to meet needs like food in the off season when work opportunity is very limited.*
 - Female, 39, class IX, In-depth individual interview



Washing in polluted water Photo: M Khan

Sutarkhali and Khali Nagor

- Water fetched from Pump/pond.
- Photo M Khan



Men go, women stay, independence grows



- *Men can continue earning money by migrating from the locality but women cannot. There were no activities related to agriculture and shrimp gher even no fish in the river for fishing. Cyclone Aila inundated agricultural land with saline water and washed away the shrimp gher. So women were in financial hardship.*
 - Male, 49, class X, FGD with PIC members

Traditional livelihoods can be enhanced

- *NGOs and other informal loan authorities grant loans in the name of women because women are there and they cannot go and flee away like men. Moreover women have jewellery, poultry, livestock etc. to pay the instalments of the loan. But men took control over the loan because they think that they can invest it in a better way.*
 - Female, 37, class V, FGD with vulnerable women



Independence is the goal of GOs & NGOs

- *If I did not get mati khater kaj I must borrow and take loans from other people but I am not doing that. The amount of money I am getting in every two weeks is enough to buy necessary goods and I am not seeking help from others.*
 - Female, 39, class VII, In-depth individual interview



Men & women working together on GO projects
Photo: M Khan

Government work programmes change gender relations

- *If I earn money in a proper way to survive and if I work honestly, that is also following religious principles. –*
 - Female, 37, class V, FGD with female headed household



- *Gender violence, husband-wife chaos and dispute, sexual harassment and other issues and problems have decreased in this area. And I believe that the number of incidents has been decreased because of letting women go to work and earn along with men. I must not say, there is no gender-based violence but it has been reduced.*
 - Male, 49, class X, FGD with UDMC members.

Change is partial and uneven

- *I know better how the household is managed and my experiences help develop coping mechanisms in disastrous time but I cannot take tasks independently. I feel it is too complex, it is too difficult to make any decision without the opinion of the male members. And I do that because I am born and brought up with this sort of belief.*
 - Female, 45, class V, FGD with PIC)
- *In our patriarchal society, we [women] had to do whatever men wanted. But since then [after Aila] attending different training provided by NGOs now I can make an income. I am asked to give my opinion before taking any family decision.*
 - Female, 25, class XIV, FGD with vulnerable women)