POLICY BRIEF

Gender-Transformative Water Governance, Climate-Resilient Livelihoods, and Erosion-Adaptive Mobility for Char Lata, Patuakhali

Project: Women Leading the Tide Gender-Transformative Water Governance in Char Lata (IUCN BRIDGE Gender Grant)
Partners: OBHIZATRIK Foundation & Innovative Development Practitioners and Thinkers (INDEPTH) Ltd
Target: Chalitabunia Union, Rangabali Upazila, Patuakhali District | Date: June 1, 2026

90.2%
Women bear water & care burden

0%
Women hold decision-making power

86.1%
lack safe water year-round

97.5%
face ash pollution daily

THE PROBLEM: THREE CRISES, ONE COMMUNITY

Char Lata is a remote river island at the confluence of the Meghna River estuary where three distinct crises converge: climate-induced salinity, coal ash pollution from the Payra Thermal Power Plant, and a complete vacuum in accountable water governance. Baseline data from 122 community members (101 women, 21 men) reveals a community in systemic failure.

CLIMATE CRISIS

95.9% face salinity intrusion. 99.2% experienced water shortages from disasters. Cyclones damage 99.2% of homes. Drinking water is available only during the rainy season for 86.1%.

INDUSTRIAL POLLUTION

97.5% report coal ash fall from the Payra Thermal Power Plant. 98.4% report crop damage, 95.9% pond contamination, and 91% have no coping mechanism.

GOVERNANCE VACUUM

Only 14.8% are aware of local water committees. 82.2% of women have never spoken in a community meeting. Women hold 0% of decision-making roles despite bearing 90.2% of water responsibilities.

Two additional existential threats compound these crises:

- **Riverbank Erosion:** The Meghna estuary can consume 500–1,000 metres of land in weeks, regularly displacing Chalitabunia Union residents and destroying water infrastructure.
- **Tidal Communication Barriers:** Boat access, the only means of reaching Char Lata, is governed by unpredictable tidal patterns, effectively stranding the community and severing links to markets, healthcare, and governance forums.

Core Problem

Women bear 90.2% of water collection and household care responsibility, hold 0% of decision-making power, and now face the additional threat of losing their land and being cut off from survival resources due to erosion and tidal unpredictability.

PROPOSED SOLUTION: A FOUR-PILLAR STRATEGY

This policy brief presents a four-pillar, costed strategy to address intersecting vulnerabilities through gender-transformative action. The total investment required is BDT 2.62 crore (~USD 216,000) over 12 months.

Pillar 1: Gender-Transformative Water Infrastructure

Infrastructure ownership and management must be vested in women, not the Union Parishad, to ensure sustained access and accountability.

Infrastructure	Quantity	Gender-Transformative Feature	Cost (BDT)
Covered Rainwater Harvesting Tanks (5,000–10,000L)	6 units	Keys and access managed by 60 trained women change agents	360,000
Covered Pond Sand Filters (PSFs)	3 units	O&M training exclusively for women; disability-accessible	540,000
Women-Only Cyclone Shelter with WASH	1 unit	Female-led management; training centre; GBV protection	10,000,000

Pillar 1 Total: BDT 10,900,000

Pillar 2: River Erosion Resilience & Climate-Adaptive Mobility

Char Lata's isolation and physical instability are not side issues, they are central barriers to water governance, livelihood security, and women's participation.

Intervention	Issues Addressed	Gender-Transformative Feature	Cost (BDT)
Early Warning System for Riverbank Erosion	500–1,000m land loss in weeks; displacement risk	Women trained as 'Erosion Watchers'; integration with WWUG	500,000
Tide-Adaptive Community Jetty/Landing Station	98% women face mobility restrictions; medical access	Women-led committee; safe waiting area with WASH facilities	2,500,000
Community-Based Erosion Coping Mechanism Fund	No coping mechanism for erosion-induced displacement	Fund co-managed by WWUG; women-headed households prioritized	1,000,000
Floating Ambulance/Emergency Transport Boat	Maternal health emergencies; disaster evacuation	Women's health prioritized; female paramedic onboard	800,000
Raised Erosion-Resilient Homestead Platforms (Pilot)	Loss of homes; displacement of WASH infrastructure	Women-headed households prioritized; 50 most vulnerable HHs	2,500,000

Pillar 2 Total: BDT 7,300,000

Pillar 3: Climate-Smart Livelihood Windows

Livelihood interventions are designed for zero or low mobility, critical given that 98% of women face mobility restrictions, with all enabling conditions controlled by women.

Livelihood Window	Households	Projected Annual Return (BDT)	Total Investment (BDT)
Saline-tolerant sunflower cultivation	200 HH	15,000–25,000/HH	1,300,000
Crab fattening (aquaculture)	100 HH	10,000–15,000/HH	1,000,000
Homestead food gardens (raised beds/floating)	300 HH	8,000–12,000/HH	900,000
Indigenous poultry (local chicken breeding)	300 HH	6,000–10,000/HH	1,200,000
Waste-to-wealth compost (community)	1 Village	500–1,000/month per woman	60,000

Pillar 3 Total: BDT 4,460,000

Enabling conditions: Women-only collection points; joint land use certificates; PKSF no-interest microloans.

Pillar 4: Governance, Capacity, and Advocacy

Sustainable change requires institutionalised women's leadership, trained, registered, and connected to decision-making at every level.

Activity	Beneficiaries	Cost (BDT)
Formation of registered Women's Water User Group (WWUG)	60 women change agents	150,000
Gender-transformative DRR training (GBV protection protocol)	200 women + 50 men	300,000
Public speaking & negotiation training (with stipends)	100 women	400,000
Multi-stakeholder advocacy dialogue (quarterly)	Community + government + industry	200,000
Community-based environmental monitoring system	30 women monitors	150,000

Pillar 4 Total: BDT 1,200,000

TOTAL BUDGET SUMMARY

Pillar	Focus Area	Estimated Cost (BDT)
Pillar 1	Gender-Transformative Water Infrastructure	10,900,000
Pillar 2	River Erosion Resilience & Climate-Adaptive Mobility	7,300,000
Pillar 3	Climate-Smart Livelihood Windows	4,460,000
Pillar 4	Governance, Capacity, and Advocacy	1,200,000
	Sub-Total	23,860,000
	Contingency (10%)	2,386,000
GRAND TOTAL	~USD 216,000	26,246,000

STAKEHOLDER RESPONSIBILITIES

Stakeholder	Role	Key Responsibility	Timeline
Bangladesh Water Development Board (BWDB)	Erosion Forecasting	Provide erosion data; integrate local monitoring into national systems; construct saline-barrier pond	Months 1–6
LGED	Infrastructure	Construct tide-adaptive jetty; coordinate with ADB Adaptive River System Management Project	Months 3–9
Ministry of Disaster Management (MoDMR)	Protection & Shelter	Fund women-only cyclone shelter; integrate GBV referral pathway; train CPP volunteers	Months 2–6
Dept. of Public Health Engineering (DPHE)	WASH	Supervise PSF and rainwater tank construction; ensure designs are erosion-resilient	Months 2–5
Ministry of Environment (MoEFCC)	Environmental Compliance	Investigate Payra Power Plant; link Char Lata to UNDP Offshore Small Islands project	Months 1–3
Union Parishad (Chalitabunia)	Local Governance	Allocate khas land; co-manage Erosion Coping Fund with WWUG	Month 1
Obhizatrik Foundation	Implementation	Train 60 change agents; facilitate WWUG registration; convene dialogues	Months 1–12
IUCN BRIDGE	Technical Oversight	Link Char Lata to Meghna Basin transboundary erosion and sedimentation policy	Months 1–12

IMMEDIATE NEXT STEPS

1. BWDB/LGED: Conduct rapid hydrological assessment at Char Lata to determine optimal jetty location (factoring in 1997 cyclone surge levels and shifting shoreline dynamics).
2. MoDMR/CPP: Train local volunteers on erosion-specific early warning dissemination and tidal-safe boat operations.
3. Obhizatrik Foundation: Recruit and train 10 'Erosion Watcher' women from the most river-proximate households.
4. MoEFCC: Formally link Char Lata to the ongoing UNDP Offshore Small Islands & Charland project (2019–2027) for housing and embankment support.

CONCLUSION & REQUEST FOR ACTION

Core Argument

The women of Char Lata cannot govern water if the land beneath them is eroding into the river. They cannot attend meetings if the tide prevents boats from landing. Erosion and tidal isolation are not separate problems, they are the physical infrastructure of exclusion.

This policy brief provides a clear, costed, evidence-based roadmap. The total investment of BDT 2.62 crore (~USD 216,000) over 12 months includes the construction of a tide-adaptive jetty, an erosion early warning system, a floating ambulance, and raised homestead platforms, interventions that directly address the mobility and land security barriers that keep women silent and invisible.

We respectfully request a formal response within 30 days, including:

- Confirmation that LGED will conduct the jetty feasibility study at Char Lata.
- Confirmation that the UNDP Charland project will extend its housing support to Char Lata.
- Initiation of the DoE investigation into Payra Thermal Power Plant ash pollution.

Prepared by: Obhizatrik Foundation, on behalf of the Women of Char Lata

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