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Summary of Findings

Evaluations of Seven Climate Bridge Fund Supported Projects


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Evaluations of Seven Climate Bridge Fund Supported Projects

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Introduction

The Climate Bridge Fund (CBF), established by BRAC in collaboration with the Government of Germany through KfW in 2019, is aimed to strengthen the resilience of climate-vulnerable communities and climate-displaced populations in Bangladesh. As one of the most climate-affected countries globally, Bangladesh grapples with rising sea levels, erratic rainfall, salinity intrusion, and frequent natural disasters, which exacerbate poverty and displacement, particularly in rural and low-income urban areas. The CBF supports targeted interventions aimed at improving the resilience of these vulnerable communities by focusing on sustainable livelihoods, skills development, and climate adaptation. In this Evidence & Insights, we draw on evaluations of seven projects that were funded through one of the early rounds of the CBF mechanism.

While other agencies implemented several other CBF projects, all seven projects covered in this note were implemented by BRAC. These CBF-funded BRAC initiatives are diverse in the types of interventions and target groups - addressing socioeconomic recovery, empowerment, and climate resilience across distinct demographic groups, including ultra-poor women, urban slum dwellers, youth, returnee migrants, and small enterprise owners. The nature of interventions is also diverse, including vocational skills, access to finance and assets, climate-smart agriculture, etc. This diversity demonstrates CBF's understanding of the diverse needs of different target groups and the importance of providing tailored support to address those needs effectively.

These projects are significant not only for the immediate benefit of targeted communities but also for an alignment with national and international development goals. The projects contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by addressing poverty, inequality, and climate action while also aligning with Bangladesh's national strategies for climate adaptation and economic recovery.

While the projects were designed and selected against the backdrop of COVID-19 effects, their launch faced significant delays in obtaining the required permissions for fund disbursements. The innovative nature of the funding mechanism required careful navigation through bureaucratic processes, which extended the timeline. Consequently, the recovery from COVID-19 became less relevant, and the total duration of the intervention had to be shortened. Finally, the economic disruptions and high inflation in the early stage of the interim government coincide with the project's completion. These are important contextual factors in reading the findings from the evaluations.

Methodology

We adopted quasi-experimental methods in these evaluations. The studies were designed to utilize panel data collected at both baseline and endline, employing a combination of difference-in-differences (DiD) and propensity score matching (PSM) methods to evaluate the impact of the projects on their target groups. While this could be applied to most of the projects, some adjustments were made to accommodate changes in target groups and timing of the interventions.

The surveys covered program participants and comparison groups to enable a comparative analysis of the interventions' impacts (Table 1, see Table A1 in Annex for further details of project target groups). During the survey, comparison group households and respondents were identified from the communities located in the intervention districts and based on the socioeconomic similarities with the intervention group. Efforts were made to revisit all households surveyed during the baseline. However, some attrition occurred due to relocation, unwillingness to participate, or programme dropout.

As we could not randomly allocate intervention and comparison groups, we applied the PSM method to reduce the influence of selection bias on the outcomes. In simple terms, PSM is a statistical technique that pairs intervention and comparison units with similar observable characteristics. The method allows an estimation of the causal impact of an intervention as any difference in outcome between matched units can reasonably be attributed to the intervention, aka, the programme. The matching process was based on baseline characteristics such as household demographics (e.g., age, gender, and household size), socioeconomic indicators (e.g., income, savings, and asset ownership), and geographic factors (e.g., urban versus rural residence). Due to the nature of their profession, Aarong intervention group respondents had higher baseline income and savings; hence, comparison group respondents were not compared to them. DiD techniques were employed to isolate the effects of interventions further. By comparing changes over time between the intervention group and comparison

Table 1. Sample for Intervention and Comparison Group

Project	Target Group	Baseline	Endline
P1	Ultra-poor women in urban slums and rural climate hotspots	694	663
P2	Climate migrants and the "new poor" in urban low-income settlements	683	657
P3	Youth from climate-vulnerable households	598	693
P4	Unemployed and underemployed youth from climate-vulnerable households	284	531
P5	Returnee migrants impacted by COVID-19 and climate change	467	393
P6	Climate-vulnerable farmers affected by COVID-19	688	674
P7	Climate-vulnerable CMSE owners and AAF artisans	98	677
Comparison Group (Household)		507	473
Comparison group (Youth)		510	417

** Comparison group (household) is the comparison group for projects other than SDP.

** Comparison group (youth) is the comparison group for SDP projects.

groups, this method provided robust evidence of the causal impact of project activities on key outcomes. These projects have a diverse set of outcomes depending on the target group and the nature of the intervention. For this E&I, we only present results on indicators that are common across all the projects—improvement in income, climate awareness and action, and women empowerment, which are also crucial in overall socioeconomic sustainable growth and climate resilience of the population.

Findings

Economic Impacts

The projects have demonstrated notable impacts on the incomes of climate-vulnerable households across most projects. These impacts were achieved through diverse interventions such as skills training, business support, and climate-resilient agricultural practices. However, the magnitude and distribution of these income gains varied significantly across the seven projects, reflecting differences in their design, target groups, and implementation strategies.

Impact on Income of the Participants

Individual income improvements were observed across projects, although the extent of these gains varied widely. Ultra-poor Graduation Program (UPGP-P1) interventions resulted in an impact of BDT 889, as programme participants experienced an income increase that was 82% higher than that of the comparison group. Urban Development Programme (UDP - P2) respondents showed a unique trend where both groups experienced a significant income loss; however, the loss in the control group was significantly smaller, yielding a positive impact of BDT 2,304. One of the Skills Development Programme's projects (SDP - P3), which targets youth to provide vocational skills, has three components: Partnership Reinforcement for Integrated Skills Enhancement (PRISE), Promoting Business Incubation for Small Entrepreneurs (PROMISE), and Skills Training for Advancing Resources (STAR). In the PRISE initiative, a modest impact of BDT 144 was observed. In contrast, SDP's PROMISE initiative demonstrated the highest participant income gain with a substantial impact of BDT 8,038. This can be attributed to their existing higher baseline income compared to the other groups within P3. SDP's STAR initiative also reported notable participant income growth with an impact of BDT 2,162. In SDP (P4), programme intervention had an impact of BDT 1,298 on respondent income.

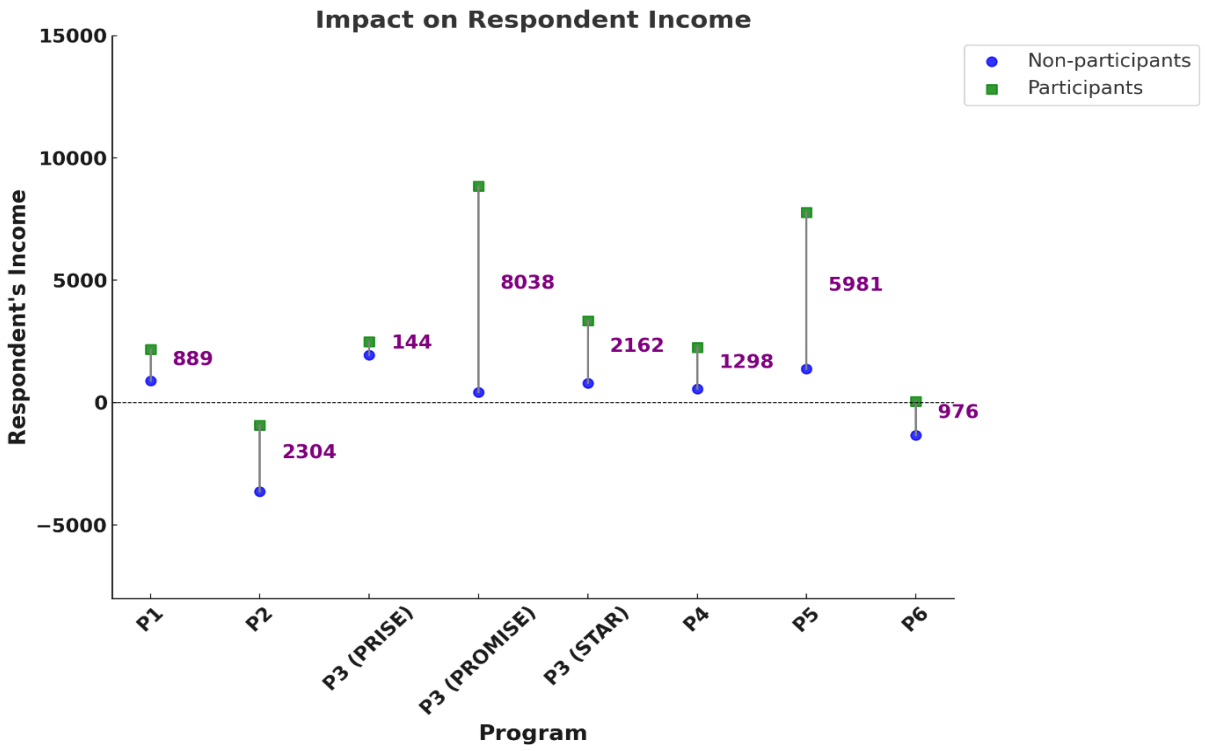

Figure 1. Impact of programme intervention on respondent income

Migration (P5) participants experienced a significant income increase, with an impact of BDT 5,981. As they are mostly skilled individuals with experience working abroad, this high impact can be related to both programme interventions and their existing profiles. Climate Change Programme (CCP-P6) showed a minor decline in participant income of BDT 143, while non-participants saw a greater loss of BDT 1,119. These respondents are individuals residing in remote climate-vulnerable locations, and their decline in income is closely related to the impacts of natural calamities. However, the net positive impact reflects better resilience of the participants compared to that of the comparison group. Under SDP's P7, Aarong participants experienced an income increase as individual income rose from BDT 284,081 at baseline to BDT 381,846 at endline. These individuals already had high baseline income as they have varied income sources, including supplying materials and products for Aarong. Their income growth derives from improved business networking and access to formal loan sources. In the Ayesha Abed Foundation (AAF) segment, participants' income increased from BDT 657 to BDT 2,109, resulting in a difference of BDT 1,452.

As the project interventions and target groups (for example, their skills, occupation, and baseline income) vary significantly, a large variation in this outcome is expected. The decline in income of urban households can be attributed to the significant political unrest and government change that took place just before the endline survey. However, the net positive impact for the P2 and other projects reflects the interventions protecting the income loss of the participants.

Impact on access to finance

Savings were a key factor in financial resilience across all projects, with intervention groups consistently reporting higher savings than comparison groups. In P1, the share of intervention group households with savings increased significantly compared to comparison households, but the average savings amount for intervention group households remained significantly lower than that of comparison households, highlighting ongoing financial struggles. P2 participants demonstrated higher average savings, reflecting the project's focus on financial literacy and access to formal savings mechanisms. P5 participants also achieved significant savings growth, with intervention group households saving BDT 11,000 more than comparison households on average. However, the proportion of households with savings in P5 declined overall, suggesting a need for sustained financial support. P7 participants, particularly CMSE owners, exhibited the highest savings levels at both individual and household levels. In contrast, the savings of AAF artisans under P7 illustrates savings disparities within the same project due to differing participant groups.

Table 2. Savings of participants and non-participants

Savings (Individual and Household)		
	Participant	Non-Participant
P1 (UPGP)	3,900	6,700
P2 (UDP)	10,768	5,648
P5 (Migration)	17,700	6,700
	Individual Savings	HH total savings
P7 (Aarong)	135,537	308,928
P7 (AAF)	7,767	29,040

Loan uptake and debt patterns varied across projects. In P1, intervention group households relied more on formal loans, though their average loan amount remained lower than that of comparison households, suggesting cautious borrowing behaviour. P2 participants saw a 16% reduction in debt levels, indicating improved financial stability, while non-participants experienced rising debt burdens. P5 participants also reduced loan uptake, with the proportion of households with loans decreasing 8 percentage points at endline, although the average loan amount for intervention group households remained high at BDT 128,500. P7 participants

displayed strong financial management, with 50% of CMSE participants accessing formal credit compared to 45.22% of AAF artisans, underscoring the success of business-focused interventions in fostering financial independence.

Social Impacts

These seven CBF-funded projects have had varied levels of social impact on vulnerable populations across Bangladesh, with significant strides made in areas such as women's empowerment, youth employability, social safety net access, mental health, and community engagement. Each project focused on specific target groups—such as ultra-poor households, urban slum dwellers, youth, returnee migrants, and small enterprise owners—and tailored interventions accordingly.

Women's Empowerment and Household Decision-Making

One of the central social outcomes of the CBF projects has been the empowerment of women, particularly in the areas of decision-making, income control, and community engagement. In P1, women from ultra-poor households experienced notable gains in their participation in family decision-making. About 35% of intervention group respondents reported greater involvement in decisions related to financial management and household matters after receiving support through the UPG programme. This is a significant outcome considering the demographic's high vulnerability to poverty and displacement. In P3, the PROMISE sub-project reported an even more substantial impact on women's decision-making. Female participants saw a 20-percentage-point increase in involvement in household decisions regarding education, health, and resource allocation. Similarly, the PRISE sub-project improved women's participation in decision-making related to household resources, achieving a 3.36-percentage-point increase compared to the control group. The empowerment of women extended beyond decision-making to financial autonomy. In P5, focusing on returnee migrants, the proportion of female participants with full control over their income rose to 33%, an increase from 28% at baseline. Although this improvement is positive, it was less pronounced compared to P1 and P3, reflecting the challenges faced by women in reintegrating economically after displacement.

Table 2. Summary of impact on social indicators

Indicator	HH Decision Participation (Female)	Female Empowerment	Social Safety Net Coverage	Climate Awareness	Climate Adaptive Solution Adoption	Savings Practice
P1	High	High	Low	High	Low	High
P2	High	High	Moderate	High	Low	Low
P3	High	Moderate	N/A	Moderate	Low	High
P4	High	Low	Low	High	Low	Low
P5	Moderate	High	Moderate	High	Low	Low
P6	High	N/A	N/A	Moderate	Moderate	N/A
P7	High	Moderate	N/A	High	Low	High

Climate Awareness and Action

Climate awareness was a common theme across all projects, with intervention groups generally showing high familiarity. In P1, 80% of intervention group households were aware of climate change, similar to 79% in the comparison group. 62% of intervention group households reported experiencing climate-related challenges. P2 had slightly higher awareness levels, with 86% of intervention group households familiar with climate change at endline, compared to 79% in the comparison group, benefiting from community sensitization efforts. P5, targeting returnee migrants, saw awareness rise from 82% at baseline to 92% at endline. However, many lacked the resources to act on this knowledge. P6 achieved the most significant increase, with 39.5% of intervention group households reporting familiarity with salinity, waterlogging, and climate-resilient farming at endline, up from 24.5% at baseline, benefitting from programme interventions. P7 promoted climate awareness among small business owners and AAF artisans, but CMSE participants were generally more informed than AAF artisans, highlighting knowledge disparities. Despite high awareness, climate-resilient practices varied. In P1, only 16% of intervention group households took action, such as elevating storage spaces and modifying homes, while 84% took no steps, indicating a need for targeted support. P2 had 22.53% of intervention group households implementing adaptation measures at endline, compared to 14% in the comparison group, despite challenges like overcrowding and stagnant water affecting 77% of intervention group households.

P5 had the lowest adoption rates, with just 16% of participants taking climate-resilient actions, primarily through informal discussions and small adjustments, constrained by financial and technical barriers. P6 excelled in agricultural adaptation, with 19.9% of participants adopting climate-resilient farming methods by endline, up from 4.3% at baseline. Participants used salinity-resistant seeds, modern cattle farming, and vaccination programmes, with 42.1% receiving training on cost-reduction methods that lowered farming expenses. P7 showed progress in integrating climate strategies into business operations, with CMSE participants adopting energy-efficient production and sustainable materials, while AAF artisans had lower adoption rates due to their limited scope due to type of employment and other reasons.

Others: Project-Specific Interventions and Impacts Psychosocial support, exclusively included in P5 as a unique aspect of the project, addressed the emotional toll of job losses, displacement, and reintegration challenges faced by returnee migrants. Endline data showed intervention group participants reported improvements in mental well-being after receiving counselling and support. This intervention was crucial in alleviating stress, isolation, and stigma, enabling participants to reintegrate into their communities and regain social confidence. For P3, decent work practice-related sessions enhanced the respondents' understanding of the importance of decent work practice.

Conclusion

The findings of these evaluations show that an increase in income remains the main mechanism to improve the resilience of the household. Larger impacts on respondent income among richer programme households indicate the necessity of directing more resources towards the poorer households in the community. Access to social safety net is crucial for resilience as reduced and low access to social safety net programmes resulted in a reduction in savings and an increase in debt. However, a consistently high impact of the programme on women's empowerment and participation in household decision-making is observed. However, due to the limitations of the survey, this also warrants the need to look in-depth into the dimensions of women's empowerment on a contextual basis. Integrating the resilience-building approach in the intervention made people more aware of climate change and its impacts. However, the adoption of mitigating steps has more room for expansion.

For better resilience and economic recovery, the poorer households require more intensive support. Expanding access to social safety net programmes, and formal financial services, including credit and savings mechanisms, along with enhanced financial literacy programmes would empower participants to achieve greater economic stability. Across all projects, integrating climate-resilience training into programme activities is essential for equipping participants with the tools and knowledge to address long-term climate risks effectively. The effort to find more climate-adaptive solutions that are relevant and contextually acceptable should be continued. Finally, periodic communication, collaboration, and follow-up mechanisms should be established to measure the effectiveness of these interventions and drive continuous improvement, ensuring that all projects achieve lasting and transformative outcomes.

Annex

Table A1. Projects included in this evaluation

Project Code	Target Group	Key Intervention	BRAC programme
P1	Ultra-poor women in urban slums and rural climate hotspots	Economic and climate resilience-building, financial and social inclusion, asset accumulation, savings, and climate change coping strategies	Ultra-Poor Graduation (UPG)
P2	Climate migrants and the "new poor" in urban low-income settlements	Financial literacy, entrepreneurship training, skills development, market linkages, job placement support, WASH facilities improvement, and social safety net inclusion	Urban Development Programme (UDP)
P3	Youth from climate-vulnerable households	Apprenticeship-based skills training, job placement, entrepreneurship training, financial literacy, disaster preparedness, and employability enhancement	Skills Development Programme (SDP)
P4	Unemployed and underemployed youth from climate-vulnerable households	Market-driven skills training, job linkage services, financial literacy, and career preparation	Skills Development Programme (SDP)
P5	Returnee migrants impacted by COVID-19 and climate change	Financial assistance, psychosocial counselling, medical support, entrepreneurship training, and connection to financial institutions	Migration programme
P6	Climate-vulnerable farmers affected by COVID-19	Agricultural inputs, climate-resilient training, adaptive farming practices, market linkages, and awareness of climate-adaptive farming	Climate Change Programme (CCP)
P7	Climate-vulnerable CMSE owners and AAF artisans	Business management training, financial literacy improvement, digital skills enhancement, and empowerment initiatives for women	Skills Development Programme (SDP)

Table A2. Social Impacts

Indicator	HH Decision Participation (Female)	Asset Accumulation Decision and Gendered Income and Control Disparity	Social Safety Net Coverage	Climate Awareness	Climate Adaptive Solution Adoption	Savings Practice
P1	More than 80% (female) participate in HH and children related decision-making	More than 80% of respondents have control over asset accumulation	In terms of SSN coverage - 6 percentage point increase among the urban respondents, an overall 4 Percentage point decrease	More than 80% know about and acknowledge climate change impacts	26% HH has adopted climate adaptive solutions	46 percentage point increase in HH savings practice
P2	More than 80% (female) participate in HH and children-related decision-making	The income gap between male-headed and female-headed HH decreased by 13 percentage points compared to the baseline	30% of respondents have attended SSN sessions	More than 80% know about and acknowledge climate change impacts	23% HH has adopted climate adaptive solutions	Overall HH savings decreased but was still higher than the comparison group
P3	15 percentage point improvement in HH decision-making participation among the female	70% of PRISE and STAR respondents either have no income or no control but 82% of PROMISE respondents have partial to full control over income	N/A	78% know about and acknowledged climate change impacts	21% HH has adopted climate adaptive solutions	All three sub-groups of respondents reported having savings
P4	17 percentage point improvement among the female respondents in HH decision-making participation compared to baseline.	27% of the female respondents have partial to full control over income	17% of respondent households received government assistance	95% know about and acknowledged climate change impacts	3% HH has adopted climate adaptive solutions	16% of the intervention group reported having savings
P5	32% of respondents reported participating more in HH decisions in the post-intervention period	15 percentage point improvement in earning female members	33% HH linked with SSN by referral	92% know about and acknowledge climate change impacts	17% HH has adopted climate adaptive solutions	The number of HH with savings reduced, but the average value of savings increased
P6	54% of respondents reported participating more	N/A	N/A	76% know about and acknowledge climate change impacts	20% HH has adopted climate adaptive solutions	N/A
P7	93% of respondents reported taking part in HH decision-making	33% of the female AAF respondents and 95% of the female Aarong respondents reported having partial to full control over income	N/A	96% know about and acknowledge climate change impacts	11% HH has adopted climate adaptive solutions	Savings habits improved in both respondent groups in the intervention group

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