

04

CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

The Sundarbans – spanning Bangladesh and India – is one of the most climate-vulnerable, ecologically sensitive, and socially complex regions in the world. It is home to millions who live at the frontlines of intersecting crises: environmental degradation, recurring disasters, poverty, marginalization, and weak infrastructure. Through this study, we have sought to shed light on an often-overlooked dimension of climate impacts – **Non-Economic Loss and Damage (NELD)** – and its profound implications on the lives, cultures, and ecosystems of the people of the Sundarbans.

Across both countries, the findings reveal a striking pattern: **non-economic losses are deeply felt, long-lasting, and intimately tied to people's sense of identity, belonging, and dignity**. These losses go far beyond what conventional economic assessments can measure. They include the trauma of displacement, the anguish of broken social networks, the silence of disrupted education, the grief of cultural erosion, and the unseen suffering of psychological distress.

In the **Bangladesh Sundarbans**, recurrent cyclones and tidal floods have not only displaced communities but severed their access to education, health, and livelihoods. The spiritual and emotional toll – evident in the loss of sacred spaces like the Bonbibi temples, the erosion of intergenerational knowledge, and the rise of early marriages due to prolonged hardship – illustrates how deeply NELD is woven into the social fabric. These losses often remain unacknowledged by institutional frameworks and compensation mechanisms.

Similarly, in the **Indian Sundarbans**, communities face repeated cycles of disaster, recovery, and precarity. The impacts are especially stark for women, children, and the elderly – such as in stories of childbirth during evacuations or the educational discontinuity faced by girls. The irreversible loss of native flora, biodiversity, and soil fertility, combined with the crumbling of community resilience, reflects an ongoing erosion of ecological and emotional safety nets.

A shared challenge across the delta is the **lack of systemic recognition and institutional accountability** for non-economic losses. Compensation systems, adaptation policies,

and disaster relief often prioritize tangible damages – overlooking the intangible and yet deeply consequential impacts that affect people's well-being, identities, and futures.

This study emphasises that **non-economic loss is not secondary or optional**; it is central to the lived experience of climate change in the Sundarbans. Recognizing **NELD is essential to achieving climate justice. It requires a paradigm shift: from metrics and infrastructure to stories and solidarity; from reactive aid to proactive care; from siloed departments to integrated, people-centred policies.**

As the global community debates the contours of the Loss and Damage Fund and mechanisms under the UNFCCC, the voices and experiences from the Sundarbans offer an urgent and grounded reminder: that climate action must centre the invisible, the emotional, the cultural, and the irretrievable. Only then can we move towards just and compassionate adaptation pathways for communities on the edge – of the land, of survival, and of global attention.

The Non-Economic Loss and Damage in the Sundarbans is not an abstract policy issue – it is a lived reality. From lost childhoods to eroded cultural traditions, from fractured families to unacknowledged trauma, the impacts are vast and layered.

Policies must recognise that rebuilding infrastructure is not enough. Healing communities, restoring dignity, and preventing further erosion of social and cultural fabrics is essential. This demands cross-border cooperation, investment in mental health and education, and – most importantly – amplifying the voices of those living on the frontlines.

Only then can we truly begin to address the full cost of climate change.