

Social Work & Education

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UDC 364.013(477)

DOI: 10.25128/2520-6230.25.4.5

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Mridha, M. R. (2025). Community Social Work Practices in Mitigating Natural Disasters in Bangladesh: Identifying Interventions, Working Organizations and Challenges. *Social Work and Education*, Vol. 12, No. 4. pp. 613-633. DOI: 10.25128/2520-6230.25.4.5

COMMUNITY SOCIAL WORK PRACTICES IN MITIGATING NATURAL DISASTERS IN BANGLADESH: IDENTIFYING INTERVENTIONS, WORKING ORGANIZATIONS AND CHALLENGES

Abstract. This study explores the role of Community Social Work (CSW) in disaster mitigation across coastal Bangladesh. Given the increasing frequency of climate-induced disasters, the research highlights the significance of integrating CSW approaches to enhance community resilience. The study aims to identify key actors, interventions, and the effectiveness of CSW practices in disaster settings. A qualitative approach was employed, utilizing case studies, key informant interviews, and focus group discussions with NGOs, government officials, and volunteers to gather in-depth insights on local responses and social work engagement in disaster preparedness and recovery. The study reveals that diverse actors including NGOs, INGOs, government bodies, universities, and CBOs are applying community social work (CSW) approaches for disaster mitigation in Bangladesh. Interventions include climate-resilient livelihoods, psychosocial support, awareness training, and volunteer mobilization. Community organization practices such as local taskforces, women's groups, and youth-led mapping have strengthened disaster response. Community development strategies like asset mapping, savings schemes, and participatory needs assessments enhance resilience. However, the role of professional social workers remains informally recognized, and institutional gaps persist in capacity, coordination, and integration with national disaster management frameworks. This study proposes evidence-based recommendations to formalize Community Social Work CSW in disaster response by recognizing Social Service Officers as a professional cadre, integrating disaster modules into social work education, strengthening NGO-government coordination, arranging training for para-professionals and engaging trained and skilled youth and women in community-based disaster preparedness and recovery efforts.

Key-words: community social work, disaster mitigation, social work intervention, community participation, para-professional

INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM STATEMENT

Social work interventions are inherently connected to disaster management, particularly in disaster mitigation, as they address the problems faced by individuals, groups, and communities in vulnerable settings. Community-based social work plays a crucial role in strengthening resilience, fostering local participation, and mobilizing resources that reduce disaster risks. By empowering communities through education, awareness, and capacity building, social workers align their practice with effective disaster mitigation strategies. This alignment ensures that communities are not only better prepared for potential hazards but also actively engaged in minimizing their impact, thereby creating sustainable and collective approaches to disaster risk reduction. Community Social Work (CSW), particularly community development methods, is highly important and relevant in developing countries like Bangladesh. However, in this context, social work is not yet widely recognized as a formal profession. Various organizations including government organizations (GOs), non-governmental organizations (NGOs), international NGOs (INGOs), and community-based organizations (CBOs) implement principles, methods, and activities of CSW in a largely para-professional or unskilled manner. This study was conducted to investigate who practices CSW, how it is practiced, and the types of challenges faced in its implementation.

Bangladesh, located in the deltaic region of South Asia, is one of the most disaster-prone countries in the world due to its unique geographic and climatic conditions. It frequently experiences natural disasters such as cyclones, floods, riverbank erosion, salinity intrusion, and storm surges, which severely affect rural livelihoods and social stability particularly in coastal areas in Bangladesh (The Guardian, 2024; Seddiky, 2021). In these disaster-affected regions, vulnerable communities face regular displacement, loss of income, water contamination, and heightened psychological stress.

Globally, Community-Based Disaster Risk Reduction (CBDRR) has emerged as a critical framework, recognizing the role of local communities in preparedness, early warning, and adaptive recovery (Verma & Guin, 2023). In Bangladesh, several NGOs including the Bangladesh Disaster Preparedness Centre (BDPC), Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (BDRCS), and Community Initiative Society (CIS) employ participatory approaches that resemble social work methods. These include community mobilization, group facilitation, psychosocial support, and inclusive planning, all of which align with the core competencies of community social work (Mathbor, 2007; Rana & Rahman, 2023). Community Social Work (CSW) plays a vital role in awareness, relief, rehabilitation, and psychosocial support in disaster-affected communities.

Despite these practices, the profession of social work is not institutionally recognized within Bangladesh's national disaster management framework. Most disaster-related interventions are conducted by NGO volunteers or government field staff without professional training in social work. While the Department of Social Services (DSS) under ministry of social welfare is mandated to support vulnerable populations, its role in disaster mitigation remains limited and informal (Daily Asian Age, 2025). This marginalization of social work in disaster governance diminishes both the quality and sustainability of intervention efforts (Ali et al., 2014). The Cyclone

Preparedness Programme (CPP), under the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), has mobilized over 55,000 community volunteers to support evacuation, risk communication, and basic relief operations (Cyclone Preparedness Programme, 2024; Shareef et al., 2019).). However, these roles are often filled by lay volunteers rather than professional social workers trained in trauma care, empowerment strategies, or community development (Seddiky, 2021). The lack of professional engagement highlights a critical policy and practice gap.

This study investigates how community social work method and its strategies are practiced formally or informally by NGOs and government institutions in disaster-prone areas of Bangladesh. It also aims to identify intervention areas, challenges, and opportunities for recognizing social work as an essential stakeholder in disaster mitigation. Emphasizing the integration of professional social workers into disaster management systems is vital for building resilient, empowered, and socially cohesive communities in the face of increasing environmental hazards.

RATIONALITY OF THE STUDY

Various research demonstrates that rural communities often rely on traditional coping mechanisms and social capital, which, when systematically nurtured, can significantly improve disaster resilience (Mahalder et al., 2018; Shareef et al., 2019). Globally, community social work is recognized as a valuable discipline across all phases of disaster management mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery by fostering community resilience, local participation, and psychosocial support (Nathan & Heb, 2022). In Bangladesh, seminal work by Ali et al. (2014) and Islam et al. (2022) emphasizes social work's potential in transforming local disaster capacity through participatory interventions, empowerment, and behavioral change. Yet, despite this robust theoretical foundation, the integration of professional social work into national disaster frameworks remains negligible

Non-government organizations with partnership or donation of international organization or financial institutions are implementing community-centred disaster risk reduction strategies such as- community mobilization, psychosocial counselling, vulnerability assessments, and livelihood restoration, which closely align with social work methodologies (Rana & Rahman, 2023; Quader et al., 2023). Despite these capacities, these interventions are often carried out by NGO staff or lay volunteers, rather than formally trained social workers, resulting in fragmented and inconsistent implementation (Nathan & Heb, 2022; Sony et al., 2023).

This study addresses this gap by investigating how community social work practices run for community mobilization, group facilitation, advocacy, psychosocial support, and capacity building are implicitly or explicitly implemented in disaster-prone union contexts. Through focused field data, this research identifies both intervention areas and systemic challenges, and proposes pathways to formally integrate professional social work into national disaster management systems. Building on international best practices and the empirical evidence from Bangladesh, this study aims to inform policy reform, promote institutional recognition, and strengthen the role of social workers in disaster resilience.

STUDY OBJECTIVES

General objective of this study is *to explore and analyze the community social work practices in mitigating natural disasters in Bangladesh, with a focus on challenges and interventions.*

Specific Objectives

Specific objectives of this study have presented in *table 01* with indicators of each objective.

Table 01: Specific objectives of this study

Specific Objectives	Indicators
I. To identify key areas of community social work practices and practicing agencies in mitigating natural disasters.	Types of interventions such as awareness, preparedness, relief support, counseling; Names and types of agencies: NGOs- Brac, GOs-DSS, INGOs-Red Crescent, etc.)
II. To assess how CSW method is applied in community settings.	Use of community organization; community development, its principles and strategies
III. To evaluate the extent and effectiveness of these method interventions at the local/community level.	Community participation level; Outcome measures: recovery rate, resilience indicators, satisfaction levels; Scope and reach of services
IV. To identify the key challenges faced by community workers and stakeholders in disaster mitigation.	Lack of recognition of social work; shortage of trained personnel; absence of formal framework; donor dependency; coordination problems etc.
V. To propose policy recommendations for best intervention of community social work (CSW) in Bangladesh.	Suggestions from stakeholders; Gaps in existing policies; Strategies for formal recognition and integration of CSW in disaster management systems

Table 02: Working definition table of this study

Key-words	Common Concept	Scholarly Definition	Study-Specific Definition	Scholarly Definition Citations
1. Community Social Work (CSW)	Organized efforts to empower and mobilize communities to address social issues.	“A practice that seeks to improve the quality of life for communities through empowerment, social justice, and participatory development.”	Includes both formal and informal practices by social workers or similar actors to enhance disaster resilience in communities.	(Lee, 2011)

2. Formal Community Social Work	Professional, structured intervention by recognized degree-holding social workers.	“Professionally trained personnel applying structured methods in collaboration with communities to address macro-level social problems.”	Academically trained social workers engaged in disaster response through fieldwork, policy, and agency-supported roles.	(Mendes, 2009).
3. Informal Community Social Work	Community-level practices by non-professionals/NGOs with limited formal training.	“The application of social work values and strategies by non-professionals or paraprofessionals in grassroots-level interventions.”	Efforts by NGO staff, volunteers, or local leaders in disaster areas, engaging without formal social work education.	(Ife, 2013)
4. Social Work Methods	Structured approaches including case work, group work, and community organization.	“Purposeful, evidence-based approaches to intervention, tailored to individual, group, or community contexts.”	The study emphasizes community organization and development for disaster mitigation and preparedness as social works methods.	(Payne, 2020).
5. Disaster Mitigation	Reducing disaster risks before they occur through awareness, planning, and education.	“Efforts to reduce the impact of disasters before they occur, through planning, education, and infrastructure.”	Refers to non-engineering, community-led preparedness such as early warning, awareness, and local training.	(Coppola, 2015)
6. Intervention Areas	Specific sectors or themes where action is taken for community improvement.	“Sectors or issues within which planned strategies are deployed to achieve social change.”	Disaster preparedness, relief, trauma support, rehabilitation, and rights-based advocacy in cyclone/flood/river erosion/water salinity areas.	(Turner, 2017)
7. Challenges	Barriers that limit the effectiveness of social programs or responses.	“Institutional, structural, or contextual barriers that hinder service delivery and goal attainment.”	Includes lack of recognition, limited training, poor coordination, and donor dependence in CSW disaster work.	(Banks, 2012)

STUDY APPROACH AND METHOD

The study adopts a qualitative approach to explore disaster mitigation practices and the role of community social work. A combination of case studies, focus group discussions (FGDs), and key informant interviews (KIIs) was employed to capture diverse perspectives. Thirty respondents from NGOs/INGOs, GOs, CBOs, and volunteer groups were engaged in case studies, while four FGDs and six KIIs with experts provided deeper policy and practice insights.

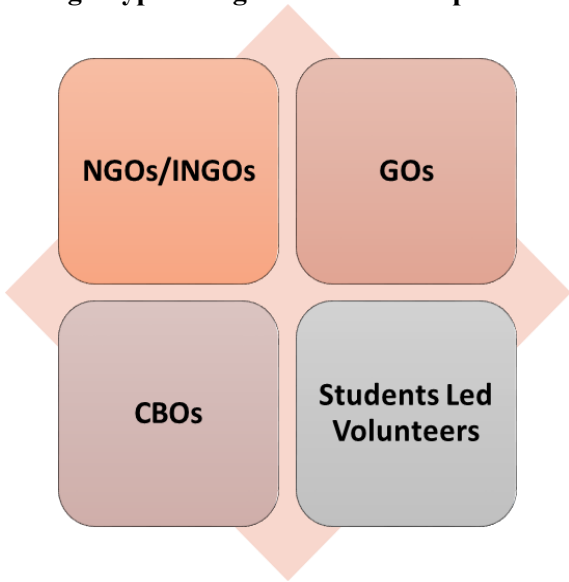
Data Sources

The study uses both primary and secondary sources of data to ensure analytical richness. Primary data is gathered through direct engagement with participants Face to face interviews, FGD guides, case study checklists, and observation sheets. These instruments are designed to be flexible and adaptive to the respondents' perspectives and experiences. Secondary data includes policy documents, NGO and government project reports, academic journal articles, training manuals, and disaster preparedness plans. Utilizing both primary and secondary data enables a nuanced understanding of the institutional, community-level, and policy-driven aspects of CSW in disaster response. This dual-source approach also strengthens the contextual foundation of the study and enhances the analytical accuracy.

Target Respondents, Sampling Techniques and Size

The study focuses on respondents directly or indirectly involved in community social work related to disaster mitigation. These include trained and untrained CSW practitioners, community volunteers, representatives/officials from NGOs and GOs, as well as local community leaders. A total of 30 individuals were selected for case studies (16 from NGOs, 8 from GOs, and 6 from CBOs and volunteer groups). Four FGDs were conducted with 6–8 participants each, while six expert key informant interviews were undertaken to gain policy and practice insights. Purposive sampling was applied to ensure the inclusion of information-rich cases with relevant disaster mitigation experience.

Figure 01: Target type of organization for respondents' selection



Study Locations

The study selected Satkhira, Faridpur, Feni, and Barguna to capture Bangladesh's ecological and hazard diversity. Satkhira faces cyclones and floods, Faridpur struggles with river erosion and flooding, Feni is vulnerable to floods and cyclones, while Barguna experiences tidal surges and cyclones. These districts together represent varied disaster contexts, enabling comparative insights into community responses. Moreover, the areas have notable community social work (CSW) engagement, making them suitable for exploring local mitigation strategies and resilience-building practices effectively.

Data Collection Techniques

The study employed qualitative techniques to gather in-depth information from respondents. Primary methods included face-to-face interviews and direct observation during field visits. Face-to-face interactions allowed for building rapport, clarifying responses, and capturing nuanced experiences of community members engaged in disaster mitigation. Observation complemented interviews by documenting behaviors, practices, and contextual realities that might not emerge through verbal responses alone, ensuring a more holistic understanding of the field situation.

Data Collection Tools and Instruments

To support these techniques, several research instruments were utilized. Semi-structured interview guides were developed for case studies and key informant interviews (KIIs), ensuring flexibility while maintaining focus on core themes. Focus Group Discussion (FGD) guidelines were applied to facilitate group interactions, while observational note sheets were used to systematically capture field impressions. In addition, audio recordings (with participant consent) and detailed field notes strengthened the reliability and richness of the data collected.

Data Analysis and Validity

Thematic analysis, as articulated by Braun and Clarke (2006), been employed to analyze the qualitative data of this study. Responses been coded manually. It has developed in alignment with the study's objectives, particularly focusing on intervention strategies, applied methods, and challenges in CSW. To enhance validity, the study has employed multiple validation techniques. Triangulation has achieved through the integration of multiple data collection methods and sources. Member checking has involve sharing summaries of key findings with selected participants to validate interpretations.

Ethical Considerations

This study strictly adhered to established ethical standards to ensure participants' rights, dignity, and well-being. Written consent was obtained from all participants, including those involved in case studies, FGDs, and key informant interviews, following a clear explanation of the study's academic purpose. For two FGDs, audio recording and photo documentation were carried out using mobile devices, strictly with the prior permission of each participant. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained at every stage of the research process.

Cultural and linguistic awareness was carefully observed throughout fieldwork to create a respectful and comfortable environment for participants. Sensitive issues such as trauma, identity, and loss were addressed with empathy and caution, ensuring that no distress was caused. The research team maintained a participant-centered approach,

upholding voluntary participation, psychological safety, and the highest level of respect for community norms and values.

Table 03: Methodology in brief

Methodological Component	Summary Description
Research Approach & Design	Qualitative case study design (Yin, 2018) used to explore formal/informal CSW roles in disaster mitigation. A qualitative case study focuses on a detailed, contextual analysis of a limited number of events or conditions (the "cases") and how they relate to one another.
Data Sources	Combination of primary (30 case studies, 04 FGDs, 06 KIIs) and secondary (policy reports, academic journals, project documents) for triangulation and analytical depth.
Target Respondents & Sampling	Purposive sampling of CSW practitioners, NGO/GO staffs, community leaders, and disaster survivors across Satkhira, Faridpur, Feni, Barguna Districts or region of Bangladesh.
Data Collection Tools & Techniques	Face to face interviews, FGD guides, case study checklists, and observation sheets used with informed consent and field-based recording.
Data Analysis & Validation	Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006); Manual coding, triangulation, member checking, and peer debriefing to ensure reliability and credibility.
Ethical Considerations	Informed Consent, voluntary participation, confidentiality, and cultural sensitivity maintained throughout.
Limitations	Only qualitative, only 4 districts have covered, sample size is small, time constraints, no interest to provide info form NGOs, bureaucratic complexity form GOs.

Potential Limitations

While this study aims to provide comprehensive insights into CSW practices in disaster mitigation, certain limitations must be acknowledged. Due to its qualitative nature and purposive sampling approach, the findings may not be generalizable to the broader population. Access to trained CSW professionals and relevant government officials may be challenging, particularly in remote or disaster-affected areas. Additionally, participants may present idealized views due to social desirability bias or organizational image concerns. Logistical challenges, including weather disruptions and fieldwork delays, may also impact data collection. By recognizing these limitations, the study maintains transparency and helps contextualize its findings within its methodological scope.

STUDY FINDINGS

Aligned with the study objectives and their respective indicators, this project collected both primary and secondary data using appropriate tools. Based on the data

gathered, the study identified several themes and sub-themes for analysis. The following section presents the findings of this study.

Theme 01: Practicing Agencies of Community Social Work

From field visits and an extensive review of relevant literature, including NGO reports, websites, academic articles, research studies, annual reports, and primary data collected from diverse respondents, the study titled “*Community Social Work Practices in Mitigating Natural Disasters in Bangladesh: Identifying Challenges and Interventions*” reveals a wide range of agencies engaged in community social work (CSW) practices for disaster mitigation. These agencies can broadly be categorized into three groups: A. Governmental Organizations (GOs), B. Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and C. International NGOs (INGOs), Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), and University Volunteers.

While these actors generally employ social work approaches, primarily community social work methods their practices are not always fully aligned with social work philosophy, ethics, and holistic objectives. In many cases, their interventions are predominantly result-oriented, emphasizing quantitative outputs rather than qualitative processes. Moreover, their activities are less focused on addressing psycho-social dimensions of disaster impacts and more on operational or material aspects. Nevertheless, to some extent, these organizations and groups do incorporate social work principles and methods in their disaster mitigation initiatives. The following part is representing the discussion of those 3 categories organizations.

A. Government Organizations (GOs)

Governmental Organizations (GOs) are at the core of Bangladesh’s disaster management structure, providing both policy frameworks and operational support for mitigation efforts. The Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Disaster Management (DDM), Union Disaster Management Committees, and the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) collectively work to integrate disaster risk reduction into community-level initiatives. The DSS, in particular, emphasizes social protection through counseling, financial aid, and rehabilitation for disaster-affected populations. While these institutions ensure resource mobilization and a chain of command during crises, their approaches often remain bureaucratic and output-oriented rather than participatory or psychosocially responsive. This operational bias has led to significant improvements in relief delivery and infrastructure development, but it limits the integration of social work ethics such as empowerment, inclusivity, and community ownership (Paul & Routray, 2011; Rahman, 2019).

B. Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) and International Non-Government Organizations (INGOs)

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) significantly supplement governmental interventions by introducing community-driven and resilience-focused programs. Organizations such as BRAC, Gana Unnayan Kendra (GUK), Resource Integration Centre (RIC), JAAGO Foundation, and Concern Universal Bangladesh design localized projects around preparedness training, climate-resilient livelihoods, psychosocial counseling, and youth volunteer mobilization (Alam & Kabir, 2020; Nasreen et al., 2021; JAAGO Foundation, 2024). International actors such as Oxfam Bangladesh and Islamic Relief Worldwide bring global expertise in inclusive resilience and nature-based adaptation, while the

Bangladesh Red Crescent Society stands out for its nationwide network of volunteers and emergency response capabilities, often deployed during cyclones and floods (ICIMOD, n.d.; NGO Portal Satkhira, 2023). These organizations reflect greater flexibility and participatory orientation than state agencies, yet they also face challenges of sustainability, dependency on donor funding, and occasional misalignment with the holistic philosophy of social work practice.

C. Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and University Volunteers

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and university volunteer groups form the grassroots layer of Bangladesh’s disaster mitigation framework. Student groups from the University of Dhaka, Jahangirnagar University, University of Barishal, Government Rajendra College, North South University, and BRAC University mobilize youth for awareness campaigns, early warning dissemination, first response, and post-disaster rehabilitation activities. Their interventions span psychosocial counseling, hygiene distribution, data collection, and research-based documentation, which not only support communities but also build student capacity as future practitioners (University of Dhaka, 2023; BRAC University, 2024). While these initiatives lack formal recognition within the professional social work system, they demonstrate the value of volunteerism and academic-community partnerships in addressing both immediate and long-term impacts of disasters. The informality of their contributions, however, raises concerns about sustainability, standardization, and integration into the national disaster management framework.

Table 04: Example of University Based Voluntary Originations Work in Study Areas

Institution / Group	Pre-Disaster Activities	During-Disaster Activities	Post-Disaster Activities
University of Dhaka	Awareness campaigns, cyclone preparedness sessions, basic training on psychosocial support, mock drills	Emergency response drills, hygiene kit distribution, field data collection in collaboration with NGOs	Direct intervention during emergencies, academic fieldwork, research-based documentation, seminars, fundraising, student engagement
Jahangirnagar University	Surveying vulnerable areas, DRR education, climate change awareness	Volunteer mobilization, rapid assessments, helping NGOs with relief logistics	Academic-community partnership projects, student-led evidence generation, mental health support, workshops and campaigns
University of Barishal	Awareness on tidal surge and early warning systems, cyclone center simulation training	Field-level youth deployment, community messaging, supply distribution	Psychosocial counseling, long-term academic follow-up, local knowledge documentation, community resilience seminars
Government Rajendra	Disaster preparedness	Emergency first-response training	Local DRR education for community, academic

College	education through NSS/Red Crescent units, risk mapping in coastal unions	execution, coordination with upazila-level disaster teams	integration of disaster recovery studies, volunteer research, resilience-building programs
NSU Disaster Management Club	DRR simulations, disaster journalism training, student-led webinars	Youth volunteer deployment in coordination with NGOs and local gov't, digital mapping of affected areas	Post-disaster analysis publications, organizing community feedback forums, social media-based awareness, disaster storytelling competitions
BRAC University (C3ER, Disaster Club)	Community-based risk reduction training, preparedness drives, awareness on inclusive response planning	Real-time tracking of disaster data, early-warning amplification, collaboration with partner NGOs and INGOs	Evidence-based documentation, internship and academic publishing, localized recovery surveys, development of knowledge hubs

The collaboration among NGOs, GOs, INGOs, local community groups and university volunteers forms a multi-layered network supporting disaster mitigation efforts, although the roles of professional social workers remain informally recognized.

Theme 02: Key Areas of Community Social Work Practices

The study reveals that Governmental Organizations (GOs) mainly intervene in areas of relief coordination, shelter management, and ensuring access for vulnerable groups. Through field cases and key informant interviews, it was observed that Union Parishad-level workers and the Department of Social Services (DSS) often collaborate with technical agencies like the Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) and humanitarian partners such as the Red Crescent. Their role is primarily logistical, ensuring early warning messages reach communities, coordinating food distribution, and prioritizing groups such as pregnant women and the elderly during emergencies. One Union Parishad social worker in Borguna recalled his experiences after Cyclone Amphan: *“Lokjon panic kortesilo, amra dayitto nilam tader shelter e niye jawa r khabar ditor”* (People were panicking; we took the responsibility to bring them to shelters and provide food). Similarly, a DSS official emphasized the critical need for partnerships to overcome institutional limitations, noting that *“we need proper public-private coordination... community engagement can ensure proper preparation on flood rather [than] post disaster activities.”* These reflections indicate that while government agencies provide crucial structure and authority, their interventions are highly dependent on coordination with civil society and private actors.

Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs), including BRAC and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society, emerge as the most visible actors during disaster events. Their interventions cover diverse areas such as community preparedness training, climate-adaptive livelihoods, psychosocial support, menstrual hygiene distribution, emergency shelter support, and the establishment of temporary sanitation facilities. One BRAC community volunteer

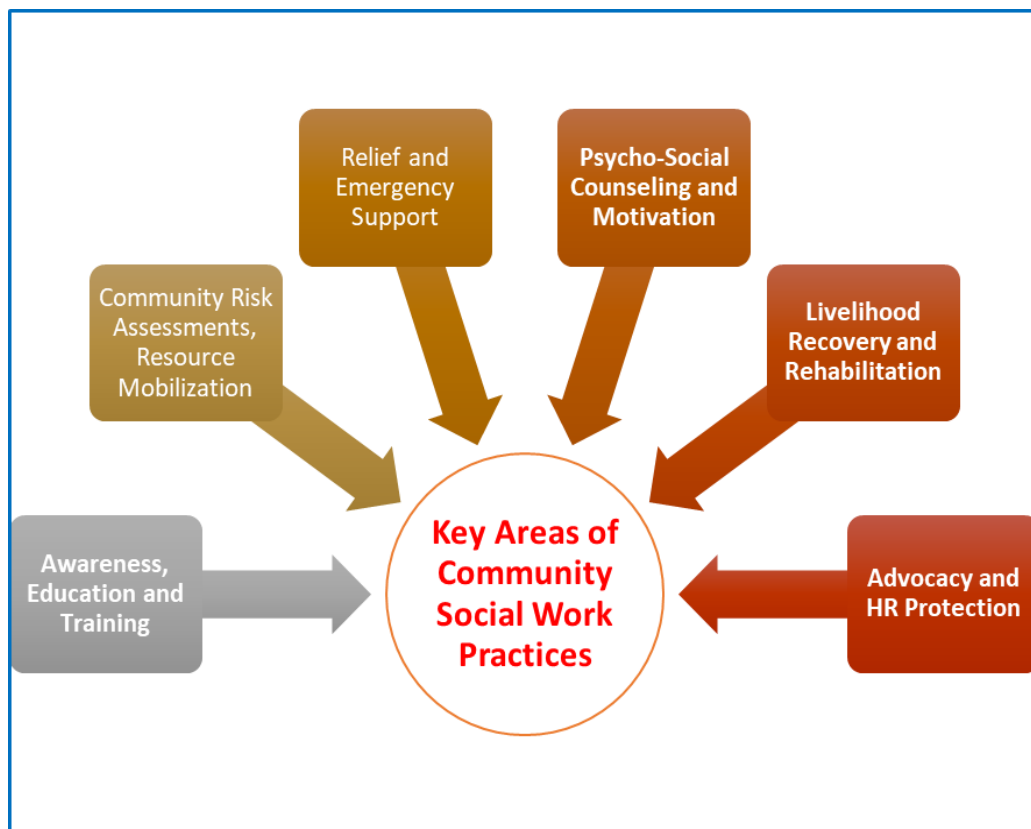
from Satkhira explained how their training changed women's roles during crises: *"Amra mohila ra agey to jantam na je ki kora uchit, BRAC-er training-ei bujhte pari je amar gram-er lokder jibon bachanor kaj amaderi korte hobe"* (We women didn't know what to do before, but BRAC's training helped us realize that saving lives in our community is our own responsibility). In focus group discussions, women participants highlighted NGOs as reliable providers of counseling, medicines, and hygiene kits: *"NGO volunteers came... gave us training and awareness on disaster preparedness... they also provided some essential medicines, which were very useful during the crisis."* These findings indicate that NGO and INGO interventions are strongly aligned with community social work values of participation, empowerment, and localized capacity building, although their approaches often remain project-based and donor-driven.

Community-Based Organizations (CBOs) and university volunteers represent the most immediate and people-centered interventions at the grassroots level. Students from institutions such as the University of Dhaka and Jahangirnagar University have engaged in activities ranging from mock drills and awareness campaigns to direct relief distribution and psychosocial counseling. A senior citizen in Feni, reflecting on the 2024 floods, described the impact of youth volunteerism: *"During the 2024 flood, students from Dhaka University came to our area with relief support. Their compassionate actions inspired us deeply in that time of crisis—I prayed for their well-being."* Similarly, a faculty member from Dhaka University confirmed that volunteerism is both academic and practical, noting: *"Students from my institute have to participate in field work as an academic activity and they also focus [on] community-based approach in mitigating disaster risk."* These insights suggest that university volunteers not only fill service gaps during disasters but also embed disaster response within the framework of education, research, and future professional social work practice. From primary data and relevant literatures, this study reveals that community social work interventions in disaster-prone areas primarily focus on the following key domains:

Figure 02 illustrates the key intervention areas practiced by community-based organizations in Bangladesh, which align closely with community social work approaches. Findings from literature highlight six major domains: awareness and education through community training and preparedness drills; disaster preparedness via risk assessments and local emergency planning; relief and emergency support targeting vulnerable groups; psycho-social counseling to address trauma; livelihood recovery through training, microfinance, and rehabilitation; and advocacy for rights and inclusive policies. Together, these interventions reflect a holistic strategy that integrates preparedness, response, and long-term empowerment within disaster-affected communities.

However, Together of GOs, NGOs/INGOs, and CBOs including university volunteers create a complementary framework for disaster mitigation, each contributing through policy, resources, or grassroots action. However, these interventions often remain fragmented and not fully aligned with the principles of professional community social work, particularly in areas of ethics, psychosocial focus, and long-term empowerment. The following discussion examines these dynamics more critically, highlighting both strengths and existing gaps in practice.

Figure 02: Community Social Work Practice Areas



Previous studies support these intervention areas as central to disaster risk reduction in Bangladesh. Paul and Routray (2011) emphasized the role of awareness and preparedness in minimizing vulnerability, while Alam and Kabir (2020) highlighted livelihood recovery and women's leadership as critical for resilience. Similarly, Nasreen, Hossain, and Rimi (2021) noted that psychosocial counseling and community-based support networks remain essential. Oxfam Bangladesh (2022) and the Bangladesh Red Crescent Society (2021) further stress community engagement and inclusive response planning as key to sustainable disaster mitigation.

Theme 03: Application of Community Organization and Community Development Principles

The study reveals from primary source that community organization in disaster mitigation is operationalized through structured, multi-stakeholder committees at local levels. A case study in Borguna reported that Union-level disaster taskforces include Union Parishads, youth leaders, school teachers, and mosque imams, with quarterly coordination meetings ensuring sustained engagement. One LGED officer noted, "*We organize quarterly meetings so that all stakeholders, youth, teachers, and local leaders are aware of their responsibilities during disasters.*" In Satkhira, women's groups facilitated by BRAC used peer leaders to mobilize neighborhood-level committees, identify vulnerable populations, and ensure timely access to cyclone shelters. A focus

group participant highlighted, *“Our peer group helped ensure that pregnant women and the elderly reached shelters on time during cyclones.”* Similarly, the Red Crescent Officer emphasized volunteer mobilization through community-based rescue groups trained via disaster simulations: *“Volunteers trained in pre-monsoon drills become the first responders in their communities.”*

Community development strategies are also widely applied. In Faridpur, DSS officers reported using community asset mapping, local early-warning training, and group savings schemes to enhance disaster resilience. A KII with a Dhaka University faculty member revealed, *“Our social work students implement participatory needs assessments and post-cyclone rehabilitation surveys as part of their field internships.”* Local youth in Borguna used social mapping and transect walks to identify flood-prone zones and community coping mechanisms. These activities reflect participatory learning, local capacity building, and empowerment approaches central to social work practice.

Community organizing strengthens social capital, disaster literacy, and localized leadership, particularly when guided by participatory planning and empowerment frameworks (Alston, 2015; Dominelli, 2020). Similarly, community development in Bangladesh emphasizes integrating disaster awareness into livelihood planning and embedding local voices into intervention cycles, aligning closely with social work’s ecological and empowerment principles (Iftekhar & Mahmud, 2022; Drolet, 2019). These findings corroborate primary data, highlighting that structured community organization and participatory development strategies contribute significantly to disaster resilience.

Theme 04: Extent and Effectiveness of CSW Intervention

This section synthesizes findings from primary sources (case studies, FGDs, KIIs) and secondary sources (peer-reviewed literature) to evaluate the *reach*, *community engagement*, and *effectiveness* of community social work interventions in disaster mitigation.

Theme 04.1: Level of Community Participation

Analysis of primary data indicates that community participation in disaster mitigation is strong during preparedness activities but weaker in policy-level discussions. A case study in Feni involving DSS and LGED revealed high engagement during awareness campaigns and mock drills, particularly among women and youth groups. Similarly, FGD participants in Borguna expressed that their involvement in planning relief and rehabilitation enhanced their sense of ownership, with one female participant noting, *“We feel this is our project, not theirs.”* A faculty member from Dhaka University further emphasized that participation increases when interventions are culturally sensitive and delivered in the local dialect, highlighting the importance of context-specific approaches.

These findings are supported by existing literature, which underscores the critical role of community engagement in disaster interventions. Drolet et al. (2015) note that active involvement fosters stronger ownership of disaster response and builds trust in implementing institutions. Likewise, Mahmud and Islam (2021) argue that sustainable participation is achieved when beneficiaries are incorporated into monitoring and feedback mechanisms, ensuring that interventions remain responsive and locally relevant. Together, these studies reinforce the importance of culturally attuned,

participatory approaches to maximize the effectiveness of community social work in disaster contexts.

Theme 04.2: Effectiveness of CSW Interventions – Recovery, Resilience & Satisfaction

Analysis of primary data indicates that community social work (CSW) interventions significantly enhance post-disaster recovery, resilience, and beneficiary satisfaction. A case study in Satkhira revealed that communities supported by BRAC through counseling sessions and group savings programs experienced faster return to livelihoods and schooling after cyclones. A Red Crescent officer observed, “*In areas with strong volunteer networks, recovery happens within 3 to 4 weeks, while others may take months.*” Similarly, FGD participants in Feni rated their satisfaction high (7–8 out of 10) when interventions combined material aid with psychosocial support, highlighting the importance of integrated and participatory approaches involving both male and female student volunteers.

These findings align with existing literature emphasizing the long-term impact of social work interventions on community resilience. Alston and Hazeleger (2016) note that sustainable recovery and resilience are strengthened when interventions include not only immediate relief but also mental health support and community cohesion training. Zaman and Shamsuddin (2020) further report that positive outcomes are more pronounced in flood-prone districts where disaster risk reduction is integrated with local development through CSW approaches. Together, these studies underscore the effectiveness of holistic, participatory, and continuous social work strategies in enhancing disaster recovery and community satisfaction

Theme 04.3: Scope and Reach of Services

Primary data indicate that CSW interventions increasingly reach vulnerable populations, though coverage remains uneven. In Cox’s Bazar, a case study of JAAGO Foundation showed targeted home visits and mobility support allowed services to reach the elderly and persons with disabilities. FGD participants in Barguna highlighted that social work initiatives now extend beyond immediate disaster relief, encompassing education continuity, digital literacy, and prevention of early marriage post-cyclone. A DSS officer from Feni noted, “*The reach is improving, but resource constraints still limit coverage in the remote chars and islands.*” Participation levels are higher when interventions respect local customs and languages, while recovery and resilience improve where trained social workers or volunteers are embedded in the community. Satisfaction is highest when psychosocial support complements material aid.

These findings align with literature emphasizing that service scope and reach are maximized when interventions are decentralized, participatory, and led by trained local actors. Dominelli (2020) notes that embedding community social work principles in local structures strengthens engagement and ensures culturally relevant coverage. Iftekhar and Mahmud (2022) observe that agencies using participatory assessments and need-based segmentation achieve broader reach, though remote and resource-poor areas often remain underserved. Collectively, these studies highlight both the progress and remaining gaps in the geographic and demographic reach of CSW disaster interventions in Bangladesh.

Theme 05: Challenges of CSW Practice

This study reveals multiple barriers undermining the effectiveness of community social work (CSW) in disaster-prone coastal Bangladesh. The findings are drawn from case studies, FGDs, KIIs, and supplemented by relevant secondary literature. Four major challenge domains emerged: lack of recognition and institutionalization, weak coordination, shortage of trained human resources, and overemphasis on material aid with neglect of psychosocial needs.

Lack of Recognition and Institutionalization of Social Work: Primary data highlight that social work as a profession remains largely unrecognized in disaster management structures. In Satkhira, BRAC volunteers and community health workers are routinely called “social workers” despite lacking formal training. As one FGD participant in Feni critically noted, *“Here, anyone giving 500-taka relief is called a social worker, but real counseling is missing.”* A Dhaka University faculty member further emphasized, *“Social work is not included in disaster management policy or planning; social work graduates are jobless while non-relevant degree holders are deployed for psychosocial work.”* This resonates with Dominelli (2020), who argues that the absence of regulatory recognition weakens the scope of social work in climate adaptation, while Jahan and Rahman (2019) note that institutional neglect leads to role confusion due to the lack of licensing standards in Bangladesh.

Lack of Coordination in Pre- and Post-Disaster Phases: Coordination failures are another key challenge. A case study from Borguna revealed that Union Disaster Management Committees (UDMCs), NGOs, and volunteers coordinate only informally, often in reactive ways. FGD participants in Faridpur echoed this frustration: *“They [officials] only come with sacks after the storm, but where were they before the flood?”* A DSS official admitted that although coordination mechanisms exist on paper, *“actors operate in silos,”* leaving communities without a referral mechanism. Iftekhar and Mahmud (2022) similarly found that duplication of services by government and NGOs stems from poor data sharing, while Sultana (2021) highlights the absence of integrated frameworks and multi-agency drills, undermining efficiency in disaster mitigation.

Shortage of Trained Human Resources and Misuse of Titles: The shortage of professionally trained social workers significantly undermines intervention quality. In Cox’s Bazar, a case study showed that even chemistry and botany graduates were working in trauma counseling units without any psychosocial training. A youth participant in Sunamganj FGDs expressed disillusionment: *“They ask questions about our family loss but don’t know how to talk to us.”* A social work trainer added: *“Volunteers with 3-day training are providing grief counseling – it’s dangerous and unethical.”* These insights align with Alston et al. (2016), who emphasize that trained social workers ensure ethical, confidential, and culturally appropriate support, and Haque and Islam (2023), who note that Bangladesh lacks accredited disaster social work programs or degree-based deployment policies.

Overemphasis on Material Aid; Neglect of Psychosocial Needs: Finally, the findings reveal a persistent overemphasis on material aid at the expense of psychosocial well-being. In Khulna, post-disaster relief focused solely on distributing rice and water, with no grief counseling or follow-up services. One woman in Borguna stated: *“Nobody asked how we feel or how our children are coping. All they gave were biscuits and ORSaline.”* A senior INGO program head admitted that *“donors rarely fund long-*

term psychosocial programs; everything is about food and shelter.” These concerns echo Rahman and Kabir (2020), who note that women and children’s emotional well-being is sidelined in emergency frameworks, and Mahmud and Islam (2021), who emphasize that climate-induced trauma has long-term consequences due to under-resourced psychosocial services.

Overall, these findings demonstrate that while CSW interventions are visible in disaster response, they face systemic and structural constraints that undermine their professional integrity, sustainability, and holistic effectiveness in supporting vulnerable populations.

Theme 06: Stakeholder Recommendations and Policy Gaps

The findings of this study reveal that community stakeholders and practitioners strongly advocate for the formal integration of community social work (CSW) into disaster mitigation frameworks in Bangladesh. Field-level voices highlight an urgent need for trained and institutionalized social work roles. For instance, an NGO field coordinator in Satkhira stressed that *“social work should be part of every disaster committee. Without trained counselors, mental problems have increase.”* This call for psychosocial support was echoed during FGDs in Feni, where community leaders insisted that *“we need female social workers to support trauma cases during cyclone evacuations.”* Their perspective reflects the gender-sensitive gap in disaster response that disproportionately affects women and children. Similarly, a DSS official emphasized structural reform, arguing that *“there should be a permanent post for social workers in disaster-prone Upazilas like engineers or health officers.”* This view reinforces the necessity of embedding CSW roles in government frameworks rather than relying on ad-hoc NGO projects. Faculty members from Dhaka University also connected academia with practice, recommending that *“the social work curriculum should be aligned with disaster risk reduction and field placement in affected areas.”* Collectively, these findings demonstrate that both community-level actors and institutional stakeholders perceive social work not as a supplementary function but as a missing professional pillar within disaster governance structures.

At the policy level, however, significant gaps remain. The revised Standing Orders on Disaster (2019) do not mention trained social workers in planning or implementation, which perpetuates role confusion and institutional neglect. Stakeholders consistently highlighted that donor-driven, short-term projects dominate psychosocial care, leaving no sustainable system for long-term trauma recovery. Ministries continue to work in silos, with social work responsibilities falling between mandates, and no accredited certification system exists to ensure quality in CSW practice. Moreover, gender disparities in professional deployment remain stark, with very few trained female social workers engaged in disaster contexts, limiting outreach to vulnerable populations. These gaps, identified through field narratives and stakeholder insights, underscore the pressing need for structural reform that recognizes and institutionalizes CSW within national disaster management systems.

Recommendation Areas	Specific Suggestions
1. National Policy Reform	• Include Community Social Work (CSW) roles in the next revision of the Standing Orders on Disaster (SOD). • Establish CSW departments or designated focal points within disaster management bodies such as Disaster Management Committees (DMCs) and the Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR).
2. Human Resources and Capacity Building	• Create a dedicated post for “Disaster Social Worker” within Union Parishads and local government agencies. • Allocate government funds for certified training in disaster psychology, psychosocial first aid, and case management for social workers.
3. Education Integration	• Introduce mandatory field placements in coastal and climate-vulnerable zones for Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) and Master of Social Work (MSW) students. • Revise BSW (BSS)/MSW (MSS) curricula to include modules on disaster resilience, climate adaptation, and community organization methods.
4. Institutional Coordination	• Form inter-ministerial task forces including the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW), Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief (MoDMR), and leading NGOs for coordinated action. • Establish formal networks linking government, NGOs, and CSW student-volunteer groups.
5. Local Engagement and Gender Mainstreaming	• Prioritize deployment of trained female social workers in cyclone shelters and trauma services. • Train local women and youth as paraprofessionals under the guidance of certified CSWs, particularly in high-risk zones.
6. Professional Recognition of Social Work	• Recognize Social Work as a formal profession in disaster and emergency response frameworks. • Ensure social work licensing and accreditation systems are strengthened through policy endorsement.
7. Inclusion in Government Cadre Services	• Include Social Service Officers as part of the Bangladesh Civil Service (BCS) Cadre under the Ministry of Social Welfare (MoSW).- • Train them with advanced knowledge in community organization, disaster case management, and participatory development approaches.

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ПРАКТИКА СОЦІАЛЬНОЇ РОБОТИ В ГРОМАДІ ЩОДО ПОМ'ЯКШЕННЯ НАСЛІДКІВ СТИХІЙНИХ ЛИХ У БАНГЛАДЕШ: ВИЗНАЧЕННЯ ЗАХОДІВ ВТРУЧАННЯ, РОБОЧИХ ОРГАНІЗАЦІЙ ТА ВИКЛИКІВ

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Анотація. У статті висвітлено результати дослідження ролі соціальної роботи у громаді у пом'якшенні наслідків стихійних лих на узбережжі Бангладеш. З огляду на зростання частоти катастроф, спричинених кліматом, дослідження підкреслює важливість інтеграції підходів соціальної роботи у громаді для підвищення стійкості громад. Мета дослідження полягає у визначенні ключових учасників, заходів та ефективності практики соціальної роботи у громаді в умовах стихійних лих. Застосовано якісний підхід, що передбачає проведення тематичних досліджень, інтерв'ю з ключовими респондентами та фокус-групові дискусії з представниками неурядових організацій, представниками уряду та волонтерами для отримання глибоких знань про місцеві заходи реагування та долучення соціальної роботи до підготовки до стихійних лих та відновлення. Дослідження показує, що різноманітні учасники, включаючи представників неурядових організацій, міжнародних неурядових організацій, уряду, університетів застосовують підходи до провадження соціальної роботи у громаді для пом'якшення наслідків стихійних лих у Бангладеш. Заходи включають надання кліматично стійких засобів до існування, психосоціальну підтримку, навчання з підвищення обізнаності та мобілізацію волонтерів. Практика роботи локальних спільнот, таких як локальні цільові групи, жіночі групи та групи молоді, зорієнтована на посилення реагування на стихійні лиха. Стратегії розвитку громад, такі як картування активів, схеми заощаджень та оцінка потреб за участю громадськості, підвищують стійкість. Однак, роль професійних соціальних працівників залишається офіційно невизнаною, залишаються інституційні прогалини в використанні їх потенціалу, їх координації та інтеграції з національними системами управління стихійними лихами. За результатами цього дослідження пропонуються рекомендації, засновані на доказах, щодо формалізації роботи соціальних працівників у громадах у реагуванні на стихійні лиха шляхом визнання працівників соціальних служб професійними кадрами, інтеграції модулів щодо ліквідації наслідків стихійних лих в зміст освітніх програм з соціальної роботи, посилення координації між неурядовими організаціями та урядом, організації навчання для парапрофесіоналів та залучення навченої та кваліфікованої молоді та жінок до підготовки громади для реагування на стихійні лиха та відновлення після них.

Ключові слова: соціальна робота в громаді, пом'якшення наслідків стихійних лих, втручання в соціальній роботі, участь громади, парапрофесіонал.

Статус статті:

Отримано: вересень 13, 2025

1-ше рецензування: вересень 25, 2025

Прийнято: грудень 30, 2025