

Climate Vulnerability and Political Participation in Bangladesh

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Citation (APA): Shuvo, M. S. H., Islam, M. J., & Easha, S. S. (2026). Climate Vulnerability and Political Participation in Bangladesh. *International Journal of Humanities Arts and Business (IJHAB)*. Vol-4, Issue-3. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.21286871>

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Submitted: 23/1/2026

Accepted: 02/06/2026

Published: 10/07/2026

Abstract

Escalating climate vulnerability due to recent unequivocal warming of the Earth has occupied pervasive scholarly and policy attention regarding disrupted livelihood adaptation and human security. Hence, the effects of displacement on political participation dynamics within a sovereign polity remain almost completely underexamined. This study employs densely populated Bangladesh, a low-lying deltaic topography with an agrarian economy, as a critical case to assess how chronic climate vulnerability conditions local political engagement. Combining insights from qualitative studies of climate vulnerability and political participation, with secondary disaster and displacement data and policy reports, this paper analyses four discrete yet interdependent cases (Remal, 2024): riverbank erosion and displacement, LoGIC and LAPA processes, and gender-responsive coastal adaptation to examine the mechanisms through which climate vulnerability affects political participation. Following a mechanism-focused research design, the cases analyse who is exposed to climate hazards, who is most sensitive, and finally, to what extent and under what criteria adaptation takes place. The results strikingly demonstrate that climate vulnerability neither uniformly suppresses nor automatically stimulates political engagement; rather, it creates two distinct paths of participation characterised by marginalisation or mobilisation, leaving scope for engagement as conditional citizenship or vice versa.

Keywords: Bangladesh; climate vulnerability; political participation; displacement; climate justice; NGOs; political ecology; democratic inclusion

I. INTRODUCTION

Bangladesh, characterized by a low-lying deltaic topography and a densely populated agrarian economy, is one of the most climate-vulnerable countries of the world. Extensive exposure to drainage basins aggravates the risk of people being readily affected by frequent floods, cyclones, storm surges, riverbank erosion, waterlogging, or heat stress. (Adger, 2006; Government of Bangladesh, 2009; Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2022; Mirza, 2003; World Bank, 2021). Affecting access to fundamental rights, such as land, food, shelter, mobility, health, and income security, this chronic environmental threat raises a critical question: how is political participation conditioned when rehabilitation captures the public's full attention? (Fox, 2015; Verba et al., 1995). The central argument of this paper illustrates that climate vulnerability produces an equal chance of two opposite phenomena, marginalisation and mobilisation, instead of falling under a uniform consequence each time. When disrupted and displaced livelihoods result in uneven or invisible institutional access, marginalisation emerges as the unwanted reality. But if the same drivers of marginalisation are addressed through civil society networks and participatory adaptation institutions, mobilisation takes place (Gaventa, 2004; Mansuri & Rao, 2013; Tilly, 2004).

Instead of asking about the nominal increase or decrease in the level of participation, the paper aims to discover the process and criterion under which participation is mobilised or marginalised in Bangladesh, by analysing two subsidiary questions: what is the exact procedure that tends to marginalise citizens from formal political participation? What are the major parameters that pave the ground towards localised claim-based informal participation in place of complete silence, and how? The conventional resource-based participation model argues that income, education, and civic skills facilitate engagement through organisational membership and political efficacy through confidence-building (Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002; Verba et al., 1995). This paper categorises these models as highly effective under stable socio-spatial dynamics and asks what happens when the expected framework of stability is completely disrupted. When mundane existence shifts to survival, assets, households, and documentation, along with the severe weakening of local authorities, it no longer remains socio-economic. Then, a critical lens needs to be raised, asking: why do structural inequalities consistently expose specific demographic cohorts to chronic crisis, and how does the state legitimise the uneven enforcement of fundamental legal rights across its territory? Drawing from political ecology, this research paper illustrates that climate vulnerability is not an inevitable outcome of natural hazards. Rather, it shifts the focus from mere exposure to power, participation, and allocation, addressing the following question: Who is exposed and why? Who is protected, who is not? Who receives adaptation resources, who does not? Why has development regarding land and water infrastructure always remained historically uneven? (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987; Ciplet et al., 2015; Robbins, 2012; Roberts & Parks, 2007; Taylor, 2015). The core concern towards participation in power pops up here. The dynamic is most explicitly applicable to Bangladesh, where relief-based NGO programs, donor-funded adaptation, disaster management, and local power structures are incredibly layered. The article identifies participation as one of the fundamental pillars for sustainable climate management, claiming development in four ways. First, shifting from the mere exposure lens, it bridges marginalisation to the citizens' voice in Bangladesh. Secondly, it revises participation theory, linking it to unsettled socio-economic reality, and introducing claim-based engagement. Lastly, by reframing climate-vulnerable populations as active political actors, the study reassesses participation planning, organisational

visibility and equal accessibility. Claim-based participation, equal distribution and management draw more attention than relief, funds, and climate vulnerability itself.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Bangladesh, one of the most critical cases of climate vulnerability, has adequate literature on adaptation, resilience, disaster management, risk mitigation, and migration. This literature focuses on how communities adapt to environmental stress. (Huq & Ayers, 2007; Huq & Reid, 2004; Mallick et al., 2011; Pelling, 2011). But the concern about how this disruption of day-to-day living affects participation as an ordinary citizen remains mostly unaddressed. This paper demonstrates vulnerability as negotiated in power dynamics rather than being solely natural (Adger, 2006; Cannon & Muller-Mahn, 2010; Ribot, 2014). The interconnected dimension of triangular conceptualisation - exposure, sensitivity, and adaptation capacity altogether demonstrates climate vulnerability (Adger, 2006; Fussel, 2007). Exposure refers to the extent of suffering from environmental hazards; sensitivity measures harm often negotiated by the voice holders and power dynamics (Wisner et al., 2004). Subsequently, adaptive capacity denotes the ability to cope, recover, and adjust under the same criterion. This literature portrays them as a power-sharing variable to represent rights, voice, and grievance-based demands.

Traditional participation research highly depends on resources, networks, and opportunities. Demand for participation emerges when citizens are educated, creating sustainable income sources and paving the way to organisational membership, resulting in institutional trust (Almond & Verba, 1963; Dalton, 2008; Norris, 2002; Verba et al., 1995). With an added layer of trust-based community action, research on governance demands effective participation, which hinges on institutional design (Gaventa, 2004; Hickey & Mohan, 2004; Narayan, 1999; Putnam, 1993; Woolcock, 1998). But when climate vulnerability occurs, from housing and schooling to personal resources to institutions and infrastructure, everything is disrupted, and all the previously mentioned conditions demand to be revised under this displaced settlement. It may disrupt each ounce of voice or create circumstance-based demands. The article restructures the resource-dependent voluntary participation model by asking: What happens when stability is disrupted, citizens are displaced, and an established network is shattered? (Verba et al., 1995). The answer is not streamlined silence. Vulnerable episodes, on one hand, can minimise formal participation such as voting, attending, and arranging meetings. However, a fair chance of engagement can emerge from shared grievances and public claims around rehabilitation, resilience, and adaptation.

To address climate vulnerability, political ecology intentionally layers two mutually faced dimensions – political and ecological to demonstrate that environmental hazards take place not only as inevitable but also due to uneven management of resources, infrastructure, knowledge, and authority (Blaikie & Brookfield, 1987; Bryant, 1998; Robbins, 2012; Schlosberg, 2007). It suggests a shift from treating adaptation activity as technologically neutral to the creation of a new dimension in authorities and power redistribution (Adger et al., 2005; Agarwal, 2005; Ayers & Forsyth, 2009; Eriksen et al., 2015; Nightingale, 2017; Okereke, 2010; Taylor, 2015). From collecting funds to redistributing relief, the issue of ‘who gets what’ renegotiates power dynamics through inclusion, exclusion, and right to voice, paving the way for grievances. Collective action is then mobilized as the opposite outcome when the grievance finds mutual ground through shared experience of injustice, coordinated leadership, and institutional backup (Olson, 1965; Ostrom, 1990; Tilly, 2004). But when channels are unevenly distributed and manipulated by local power dynamics, public claim-based participation becomes a negotiated project shaped, mediated, or mitigated by the very NGO, disaster-based affiliation community program, or social network.

This paper does not promise that vulnerability always results in mobilisation. Rather, frequent exposure to the same territorial space often results in political withdrawal and exhaustion. Uneven and unstructured distribution of adaptation resources and resilience technologies, based on face value and visibility, destroys institutional trust. Furthermore, procedural inclusion through NGOs provides participation on paper; however, it lacks the required representative participation in decision-making and the elimination of inequalities. The reason behind this gap is not inadequate study on climate vulnerability or participation separately, but rather the absence of an interlinked framework between them that addresses the mechanism-based concern: how the transformation from climate vulnerability to active participation takes place. This paper aims to mitigate the structural gap by advancing the concept of conditional citizenship: the notion that the effective ability of climate vulnerable citizens depends more on the fulfillment on certain conditions such as stable residence, documentation and administrative recognition, mobility and physical access, livelihood security and time, social networks and organizational support, institutional responsiveness, freedom from patronage and intermediary dependence and gender, class, social position rather than full scale of routine formal participation.

III. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

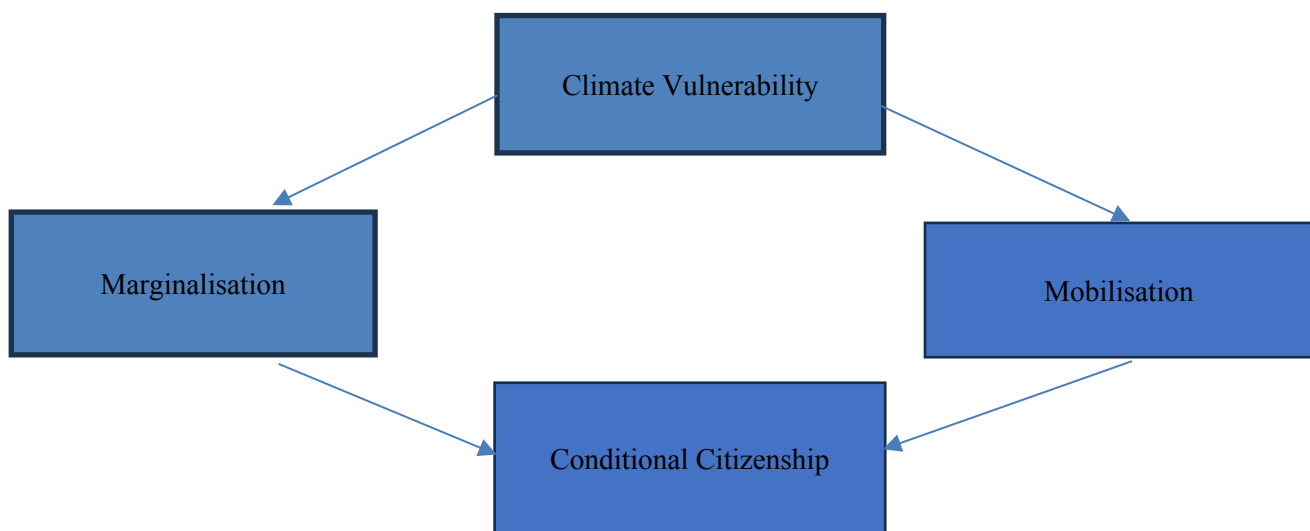


Figure 1. Climate vulnerability, participatory mechanisms and conditional forms of citizenship

The framework shown in Figure 1 connects climate vulnerability and political participation through two completely distinct mechanisms – marginalisation and mobilisation. Both phenomena can coexist and operate under the same life course or territorial zone. Citizens may not be able to perform routine-based formal participation – voting, representing in a ward meeting, or reaching out to a political leader; however, they can vigorously contribute in a relief claim, NGO driven participation, protest, or community adaptive initiative. Marginalisation refers to the complete exclusion of vocal engagement in power dynamics. The absence of voice navigates through a sequential pipeline consisting of five channels. Firstly, disrupted livelihoods demand full attention in rehabilitation, reducing time, resources, and stability. Subsequently, it also destroys the established network of territorial-based representation and institutional access. Lost or weakened documentation and re-registration for voting rights continuity make it difficult to access public services. Additionally, relief dependency tends to create negotiated participation

by influential elites or middleman brokers through the politics of visibility. Ultimately, even the mere form of mediated participation loses momentum due to gender burdens and constrained mobility. (Agarwal, 1997; Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Denton, 2002).

Concept	Working Meaning in This Study	Empirical Indicators	Expected Political Relevance
Exposure	The extent to which individuals or communities come into contact with climate-related hazards.	Floods, cyclones, riverbank erosion, salinity intrusion, heat stress and waterlogging.	Establishes the climate-risk context; however, does not by itself determine whether citizens become marginalised or mobilised.
Sensitivity	The degree to which people are harmed by climate exposure due to their social and economic position.	Poverty, landlessness, insecure housing, climate-dependent livelihoods, gendered care burdens and weak access to services.	Raises the cost of participation by increasing insecurity, reducing time and weakening citizens' ability to engage routinely with institutions.
Adaptive capacity	The resources, networks, mobility, documentation, and institutional connections that allow citizens to cope with climate stress and make claims.	Income, education, secure documents, mobility, NGO access, community networks and responsiveness of local institutions.	Shapes whether vulnerability produces political exclusion, organised claims-making or both.
Formal participation	Participation through recognised political and administrative institutions.	Voting, contact with representatives, Union Parishad meetings, local planning forums and official consultation processes.	Often becomes weaker when displacement, livelihood insecurity or administrative exclusion disrupt citizens' access to institutions.
Informal participation	Non-electoral or claim-based forms of political engagement outside routine institutional channels.	Petitions, protests, relief claims, NGO forums, adaptation committees, community meetings and local bargaining.	May become more visible when climate-related grievances are organised through networks, intermediaries or participatory adaptation institutions.

Table 1: Prepared by the authors illustrating the Operationalisation of Core Concepts

On the other hand, mobilisation denotes the transition from climate-oriented vulnerability to corresponding community action, directly impacting the local power-bubble. If the ground meets structured organisational support and institutional opening, mere marginalisation explodes into public meetings, petitions, protests, negotiations, consultations, and collective demands for infrastructure, relief, and rehabilitation. When the mobilisation is reassessed from a political ecology perspective, it is often stressed that exposure and sensitivity are never evenly distributed, generating implicit and hesitant participation. The mere distress from whether participation occurs, to who participates, under what rules, through which intermediaries, and with what

consequences for power, determines whether participation would be empowering, eligible enough to hold the power structure accountable and disciplinary, where access is open, but operates via loyalty, visibility, and compliance. The outcome from exposure and vulnerability is neither linear nor uniform, but conditional. When disruption causes displacement and institutional invisibility, affected, isolated citizens are mostly marginalised. Therefore, the unwanted phenomenon reconfigures engagement from routine channels to episodic, issue-specific voice to ensure the fulfilment of proper conditions required for rehabilitation towards regular livelihood.

IV. RESEARCH METHOD

Drawing on a qualitative study, the article operates a mechanism-based research design. The goal of this paper is not to speculate on a nominal outcome, whether participation happens or not; rather, addressing all the confounding variables from contextual background to gender relations and power structure, and the consequence establishes a process-based paradigm addressing how and under what conditions climate vulnerability transforms into political engagement, and to what extent. Exposure to frequent climate risks, a highly dense population, mass domestic displacement, a robust NGO sector linked with a functioning local government apparatus, and mature disaster management infrastructure positions Bangladesh as one of the most critical cases to examine the transition of climate exposure into active citizen engagement (Lewis, 2011; Siddiqui, 2005). The specific context-based selection allows the analysis to test marginalisation and mobilisation within the national dynamic, taking the procedural mechanism as the unit of analysis. The empirical foundation, based on peer-reviewed literature, policy and disaster reports, data and documentation from international organisations and NGO are selected after satisfying four predetermined criteria: applicability to Bangladesh; direct relevance to climate exposure, migration, adaptation and participation; source reliability; and applicability to introduce a mechanism rather than narrating hazards.

The analysis emphasises sources that interconnect environmental stress to institutional differences, social differentiation, collective action and state-society dynamics. To substantiate both conceptual clarity and contemporary evidence, the study draws on approximately seventy peer-reviewed articles, policy reports, program evaluations, humanitarian assessments, and institutional documents published between 2000 and 2025. The four cases are selected to reveal variation across mechanisms: Cyclone Remal shows the correlation with disaster shock, creating an equal degree of emergency participation and relief dependency, riverbank erosion and displacement draw on the marginalisation mechanism, institutionalised participation by financial aid and planning is demonstrated by the Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LoGIC) and Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA), and lastly, the Gender-responsive coastal adaptation in the Khulna and Satkhira case illustrates how targeted gender mobilisation can happen, acknowledging structural constraints related to the phenomenon. These cases do not represent a proportional sample based on statistics from Bangladesh; rather, their selection is motivated by a full multi-causal dimension from marginalisation to mobilisation. The analytical strategy for this paper remains solely focused on mechanism tracing. Starting with the introduction of climate stressors and exposure conditions, the paper identifies the drivers of sensitivity.

Case	Climate-Political Problem	Mechanism Examined	Explanation
Cyclone Remal, 2024	Severe coastal flooding, housing damage, service disruption, evacuation, and urgent relief needs.	Crisis claim-making and relief dependency.	Shows how sudden disasters can activate intense demands for relief and recovery while also increasing dependence on state agencies, NGOs, and political intermediaries.

Case	Climate-Political Problem	Mechanism Examined	Explanation
Riverbank erosion and displacement	Loss of land, residence instability, migration, and weak recognition in destination areas.	Territorial dislocation and political invisibility.	Demonstrates how climate-induced mobility can weaken formal participation by separating citizens from place-based representation, documentation, and local institutions.
LoGIC and LAPA processes	Local adaptation planning and climate-finance mechanisms operating through local government structures.	Institutionalized adaptation participation.	Illustrates how adaptation planning can create organized spaces for community voice when institutions are transparent, inclusive, and responsive.
Gender-responsive coastal adaptation	Salinity intrusion, water insecurity, disaster risk, and gendered limits on mobility and public voice.	Mediated women's participation under structural constraint.	Shows how targeted adaptation initiatives may expand women's participation through preparedness, water-management, and NGO-facilitated spaces, while broader gender inequalities remain unaddressed.

Table 2. Prepared by the authors illustrating the logical selection of the case and mechanisms.

V. FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Case 1: Cyclone Remal (2024), Relief Politics and Crisis Participation

Cyclone Remal demonstrates a case in which climate vulnerability, on one hand, shatters the structure of established routine-based formal participation. On the other hand, generates participation through claim-based public grievances. The cyclone caused extensive storm-driven flooding, residential displacement, and ravaging of infrastructure. Humanitarian assessments reported damage to around 170,000 houses, causing the displacement of more than 800,000 people. In total, an estimated 4.6 million individuals were intensely affected across 19 districts (International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2024; Relief Web, 2024; United Nations Bangladesh, 2024a; UNICEF, 2024). These statistics not only show the humanitarian scale of suffering but also portray how environmental exposure drastically reshapes the relationship among vulnerable citizens, local authorities, relief agencies, and political intermediaries. Post-disaster reporting, along with humanitarian monitoring, claims that in several unions, residents reportedly assembled in front of the Union Parishad and local administrative centres to ensure inclusion in the relief list or to challenge exclusion from emergency assistance. Such interaction substantiates the argument that political engagement immediately after disasters is often less operating via conventional electoral channels and more characterised through struggle over recognition, visibility, entitlement and access to state-provided support.

After a crisis like Remal, where basic day-to-day life was disrupted and destroyed, there was no enthusiasm among voters to cast a vote. Rather, this is the position where engagement revolves fully around the demand to contain the conditionalities for functioning as regular citizens again via access to shelter, food relief, safe drinking water, sanitation rehabilitation, and mobilisation. This eventually results in a materially driven form of episodic engagement, in which demands for participation are communicated more through elected representatives, volunteers, NGOs, and political brokers. The Remal case demonstrates the article's dual arguments: first, disaster

Damage resulting in reduced formal participation; second, the damage paving the way towards claim-based participation. Political ecology differentiates relief activity from the technical adaptation process by framing delivery assistance under visible power dynamics. If the visibility is even, this episodic participation empowers citizens. However, if negotiated, disciplined participation creates the loop for dependency (Besley & Burgess, 2002; Fox, 2015; Keefer & Khemani, 2005). Moreover, public engagement after disasters must not be explained as democratic empowerment. Affected citizens become highly active because they must overcome bureaucratic filters and political gatekeeping to ensure survival. But the main concerns involve whether they can influence the decision-making process or only compete for scarce assistance. Therefore, Cyclone Remal distinguishes between participation as activity and participation as meaningful agency.

Case 2: Riverbank Erosion, Displacement, and Political Invisibility

Riverbank erosion illustrates the marginalising effects of climate vulnerability as a more clearly structured dimension than many sudden-onset disasters because it gradually erodes the territorial foundations of citizenship. Unlike cyclones, which generate immediate crisis in participation around relief and recovery, erosion here sets the stage for a slower but deeply destabilising form of displacement. Bangladesh, being a low-lying deltaic topography, has river systems that continuously reshape land, livelihoods, settlement patterns, and local institutional attachments. Bhola and Shariatpur, as studies of erosion-prone districts, show that loss of land and property results in households either changing livelihoods, relocating to new areas, or migrating toward peri-urban informal settlements (Gray & Mueller, 2012; Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2025; Islam, 2021; Kartiki, 2011; Mallick et al., 2011). The political consequence of the mentioned process is institutional dislocation. In Bangladesh, access to local government, electoral representation, land records, welfare programs, relief distribution, and community mediation are fundamentally centered around territory. Citizens are mostly recognised via administrative visibility. When erosion displaces households from chars, riverbanks, or rural settlements, they may retain formal legal citizenship but lose effective institutional access, or they may never be embedded in any administrative apparatus throughout the rest of their lifespan.

Migrants who enter peri-urban or informal settlements then face problems transferring their voter registration, causing slowed or a lack of access to most welfare programs. Their presence in the destination area may be socially visible, but institutionally, it is fragile. As a result, displaced residents are registered politically but weakly recognised, participating only intermittently through brokers, NGOs, local intermediaries or grievance-based channels rather than through stable forms of constituency-based participation. This does not imply that erosion-displaced citizens are politically apathetic. Their participation is better understood as structurally constrained by the loss of place-based political membership. Formal participation generally relies on an address, a polling location, a constituency, a representative and a recognised relationship with local institutions. Displacement also unsettles these conditions, causing political invisibility of citizens who are weakly recognised, rarely consulted and poorly represented within state boundaries. Political ecology provides the most significant perspective that river erosion is not merely a natural riverine process. Embankment decisions, dredging priorities, settlement patterns, land tenure arrangements, poverty and unequal access to relocation assistance shape its consequences. Poor and marginalised households always suffer as they get the most precarious locations and the fewest resources to recover or adapt. Climate mobility, therefore, does not simply move people from one place to another (Black et al., 2011). It moves them across unequal institutional fields, where recognition, representation and claims-making capacity are unevenly distributed. What may appear in humanitarian language as relocation can be experienced politically as loss of voice, loss of recognition and loss of effective citizenship.

Case 3: LoGIC, LAPA, and Institutionalised Adaptation Participation

The Local Government Initiative on Climate Change (LoGIC) and the Local Adaptation Plan of Action (LAPA) process state how climate vulnerability can be transformed into organised participation using local institutions for adaptation. LoGIC was established to strengthen local planning through climate-finance mechanisms to ensure and exacerbate community-based adaptation, particularly taking local government bodies into account (United Nations Capital Development Fund, 2021; United Nations Development Programme, 2024). Similarly, the LAPA framework seeks to integrate adaptation into local development planning rather than treating climate action as a project designed and delivered superficially (United Nations Bangladesh, 2024b). Both of these initiatives demand significance in the political power dynamics because they tend to transform vulnerability from a passive condition of need into a potential basis for a collectively recognised voice. When communities participate in vulnerability assessment, priority identification, planning, budgeting, and monitoring, they gain access to formal opportunities of forwarding demands and shape local adaptation priorities. Therefore, adaptation is no longer a mere technical exercise. It becomes a political space to claim demands for embankment repair, drainage improvement, safe water facilities, livelihood support, cyclone preparedness, housing protection, and salinity management. Therefore, LoGIC and LAPA create a form of institutionalised mobilisation where citizens participate through both protest and post-disaster involvement via local planning systems. Program evaluations indicate that participatory adaptation planning can enhance community involvement in local budgeting processes and boost citizen engagement with the local government. Moreover, drainage repair, saline water management, and livelihood diversification were cited as major concerns for communities in several project areas following community consultations. These show that although adaptation planning can create procedural opportunities in an environment where climate-vulnerable citizens have the potential to shape development agendas, the influence is uneven and hinges on institutional responsiveness.

But the political ecology approach warns against taking participatory adaptation programs for granted as being democratic or inclusive. Through adaptation finance, new resources available in local political spaces may lead to extreme competition. Additionally, the selection of beneficiaries may be determined by visibility; highly specialised technical planning language may exclude less educated people, and consultation spaces may favour individuals already networked within NGOs or local administrative networks. Therefore, democratic and participatory implementation of LoGIC-like participation is doubted as it depends on transparent institutions, an inclusive process, and institutional responsiveness. This case reinforces the argument that although resources, skills, and networks are conventionally seen as preconditions for political engagement, LoGIC-type initiatives demonstrate that institutions themselves can also create participatory capacity by providing information, platforms, and access to procedures. Thus, political ecology reminds us that such opportunities are never neutral but shaped by unequal power relations that determine whether vulnerable citizens become active decision-makers, limited consultees, passive beneficiaries, or simply data sources within an adaptation-planning process.

Case 4: Gender-Responsive Coastal Adaptation and Women's Mediated Political Agency

Gender-responsive coastal adaptation in Khulna and Satkhira is an extremely important case for understanding how climate vulnerability can inspire women's political participation under a constrained environment. Women in coastal Bangladesh predominantly face disproportionate exposure to salinity intrusion, water insecurity, burdened care responsibilities, and socially imposed restrictions on mobility. The Green Climate Fund and UNDP-supported Gender-responsive Coastal Adaptation project seeks to strengthen the adaptive capacity of coastal communities, with particular attention to women and adolescent girls who are highly exposed to

salinity-related pressures regarding livelihoods and water security (Green Climate Fund, 2018; UNDP, 2025). Recent program reporting also illustrates that women and adolescent volunteer groups have received early-warning, rescue, and first-aid equipment-based training through collaboration with disaster-preparedness structures (UNDP Bangladesh, 2025). These newly introduced roles increase women's sustainable public visibility, organisational confidence and collective presence in communities where they have historically been excluded. But the political leverage of such participation depends on whether these adaptation initiatives are linked to formal governance institutions through decision-making or not. The case demonstrates that most of the time, women's participation under climate stress does not follow conventional models of formal political engagement. Rather than participating primarily through party meetings, electoral campaigns or direct contact with representatives, women may become politically active through savings groups, disaster-preparedness committees, water-management groups, early-warning volunteer networks, livelihood adaptation forums and NGO-facilitated planning spaces. On one side, where this participation framework exacerbates skill and recognition, it can remain conditional and mediated. Women's voices can be disciplined and dependent on donor-funded programs, NGO facilitation, social norms, and the duration of specific project cycles. A program may create a space for women to speak; however, that voice becomes democratically consequential only when it influences local budgets, infrastructure decisions, water-management priorities, safety planning, and accountability mechanisms. Participation needs to be linked to formal governance to be transformative; it could be merely consultative. The challenge here is whether such alternative spaces bring women to the forefront of decision-making or involve them in externally framed resilience initiatives (Agarwal, 1997; Arora-Jonsson, 2011; Denton, 2002).

Cross-Case Comparison: From Vulnerability to Conditional Forms of Citizenship

From the four situations discussed above, it is clear that a climate vulnerability does not guarantee a uniform or predictable form of political engagement. Cyclone Remal portrays crisis participation, a process in which the afflicted population mobilises around pressing demands for relief, recovery, and public support, while simultaneously relying on relief organisations and political intermediaries. For example, in the case of river erosion, former citizens could become formally registered with the State but not effectively participate in local institutions, representation, or local recognition. LoGIC and LAPA demonstrate institutionalised mobilisation, in which the process of adaptation planning builds participatory capacity when local institutional actors are inclusive and responsive. Gender-responsive coastal adaptation also foregrounds mediated political agency, in which women have access to transformative spaces in adaptation programmes, yet remain subjected to gendered and structural constraints.

Viewed together, the cases determine the conditions of the research. Climate vulnerability causes marginalisation by affecting livelihoods, destroying assets, uprooting households, undermining documentation, and eroding institutional recognition. On the other hand, mobilisation occurs when grievances arising from climate injustice are collectively constructed, and institutions are responsive. Climate justice acts are supported. The same environmental pressure, therefore, tends to generate different political outcomes depending on social networks, institutional responsiveness, organisational mediation and adaptive capacity. The ultimate final idea of conditional citizenship captures this uneven transformation at its fullest. Citizens sensitive to climate are formally part of the polity; however, their actual capacity to voice their opinions through politics clearly depends on residence, documentation, mobility, social networks, and support from engaged organisations. Therefore, climate change does not just introduce totally new policy problems for the state, but also new social and institutional conditions of participation in recognition.

Case	Dominant Participation Pattern	Marginalising Condition	Mobilising Condition	Democratic Risk
Cyclone Remal	Crisis-oriented participation around relief, recovery, and rehabilitation.	Disrupted mobility, damaged housing, interrupted communication, and weakened routine engagement.	Emergency networks, relief channels, volunteers, media visibility, and contact with local authorities.	Participation may become dependent on brokers, relief lists, and unequal access to emergency assistance.
Riverbank erosion and displacement	Reduced formal participation and weak institutional visibility among displaced citizens.	Loss of land, residence, constituency links, documentation continuity, and recognised community membership.	Migrant networks, urban NGOs, informal settlement associations, and recognition in destination communities.	Mobile and informal populations may remain underrepresented in local decision-making.
LoGIC and LAPA	Structured participation through adaptation planning and local climate governance.	Technical planning language, uneven local capacity, and unequal access to planning forums.	Local government platforms, climate finance, civil-society facilitation, and participatory planning mechanisms.	Participation may be affected by elites; or it may remain limited to project-based consultation.
Gender-responsive coastal adaptation	Women's mediated participation through adaptation, preparedness, and community-based groups.	Gendered care burdens, mobility restrictions, social norms, and exclusion from male-dominated formal politics.	Women's groups, early-warning networks, water committees, livelihood forums, and targeted training.	Women may be consulted without gaining durable influence over budgets, infrastructure, or formal governance decisions.

Table 3. Prepared by the authors, illustrating the linkage between climate vulnerability and political participation in comparative perspective.

Furthermore, the mentioned argument follows important implications for participation theory. First, it presents an alternative to the dominant explanations of participation that focus on stable individual resources, such as education, income, and civic skills, since the disruption of these resources by environmental catastrophes can be costly from a political engagement perspective. Second, it clearly demonstrates that informal involvement must not be seen as a side event. The spaces in which citizenship is practised may transform into spaces for relief negotiations, adaptation planning, NGO-mediated forums, community claims, and localised bargaining. Finally, the dynamics illustrate the need to assess participation qualitatively. Political participation is not an adequate measure of empowerment if mediating power and dependency structures limit participation, offer controlled access, and fragmented interventions.

VI. CONCLUSION

The article has thoroughly examined how climate vulnerability shapes political participation in Bangladesh, resulting in dual and conditional political effects. Citizens may be marginalised from formal participation when environmental and climate stress intersect with displacement, livelihood insecurity, and institutional exclusion due to the predominance of intermediaries. At the same time, climate harm may lead to mobilisation when affected communities interpret their suffering as a shared public grievance and organise claims through social networks, local leadership, civil society, media attention, and participatory institutions. This paper illustrates that climate vulnerability does not simply increase or decrease political participation as a simplistic nominal outcome. Rather, it reorganises the forms and conditions under which participation occurs. Changes in formal channels of engagement can be challenging as displacement, insecurity, and administrative exclusion severely affect citizens' access to institutional structures. Informal, localised, and claim-based modes of participation are more likely to grow as vulnerable citizens demand and pursue relief, recognition, rehabilitation, and assistance essential for adaptation. The results represent an application of political ecology and reveal that adaptation is not a purely technical solution to climate risks. Climate governance in Bangladesh should therefore be assessed through the lenses of power-based agency, representation, and democratic inclusion rather than through the linear lens of resilience outcomes, infrastructure delivery, or adaptation targets (Pelling, 2011). Displaced and climate-vulnerable citizens require institutional recognition, continuity of documentation, access to local decision-making, transparent relief systems, and finally effective grievance-redress mechanisms. NGOs and community-based organisations can play an important role in supporting these processes, but participation should never remain solely dependent on temporary donor-funded projects or mediated access. To generate more accurate results on a case-based causal study, future research should test and refine the established framework through surveys, panel data, ethnographic fieldwork and comparative subnational analysis. Further studies could examine whether different forms of climate vulnerability generate distinct repertoires of participation or whether NGO-mediated participation produces lasting political influence beyond project cycles.

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