

SUMMARY REPORT

Mapping Private Sectors in Bangladesh To Collaborate with The CSO Alliance Hub

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Acknowledgements

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Introduction

Civil society organizations (CSOs), which are independent entities operating outside the control of the state, corporate, and other sectors, play a crucial role in voicing the concerns, priorities, and interests of the people. CSOs in Bangladesh, spanning religious bodies, NGOs, trade unions, professional associations, community groups, and local clubs, are pivotal in championing social change and addressing issues like human rights, welfare, and environmental concerns.

Despite constitutional safeguards, grassroots CSOs grapple with financial constraints, resource scarcity, and bureaucratic hurdles, impeding their capacity to fully empower communities.

The CSOSI scores from 2017 to 2021 reveal a troubling decline in the sustainability of Bangladesh's civil society, edging toward 'Impeded Sustainability.'

The steepest drops are seen in public image and financial viability, signaling eroding public trust and funding challenges. Complex registration, bureaucratic delays, restrictive regulations, and curtailed expression further strain CSOs. To counteract these setbacks and revitalize their credibility and impact, strategic partnerships with the private sector are essential for bolstering financial resilience and enhancing visibility.

Geographic Scope

PROGRAM OVERVIEW

Project: SHUSHIL

Implementing Partner: ActionAid Bangladesh

Funding Partner: European Union

Project Duration:

- January 2023 – December 2026

Scope of Work:

- 123 Grassroots CSOs
- 9 Districts in Bangladesh

The SUSHIL project

launched by **ActionAid Bangladesh** in **January 2023 with EU funding**, aims to fortify **123 grassroots CSOs** across **nine districts**, including Dhaka, Chattogram, and Kurigram, to champion democracy and human rights. Running until December 2026, this initiative focuses on empowering CSOs with the capacity to engage in policy dialogue, advocate for governance, and

influence decision-making. By fostering multi-actor alliances and amplifying CSO visibility, SUSHIL contributes to an accountable and inclusive society aligned with the SDGs. This mapping study explores the scope of CSO engagement and collaboration under SUSHIL to strengthen their impact.

Objectives

This study aims to craft an in-depth understanding of the local business landscape and uncover collaboration opportunities with CSOs. Through meticulous mapping, it identifies private sector entities aligned with supporting community-driven initiatives and tackling socio-economic challenges through partnership. The focus is on pinpointing businesses that share a mutual vision for impactful collaboration, enhancing community resilience, and fostering sustainable development.


01 **Identify and categorize** local and major private sector entities operating in nine districts and national level


02 **Gather information** on local private sector-

- The nature of businesses
- Industries
- Sectors

Overview of Achievements



Identified :

15 **National Private Entities**

52 **District-level Private Entities**

- Operational & Development Benefits
- District & Sector-wise Partnership Opportunities
- Recommendations for ecosystem Development

Methodology

This study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather in-depth insights from key stakeholders— **District CSO Coordinators, Private Sector Entities/businesses and Local Private Sector Ecosystem Partners.**

In-depth Interviews

09 **CSO Coordinators**

Rapid Needs Assessment Surveys

79 **Grassroots CSOs**

Key Informant Interviews

67 **Private Entities** **06** **Ecosystem Actors**



**Data-
collection
Overview**

Key Findings

CSO Landscape Overview

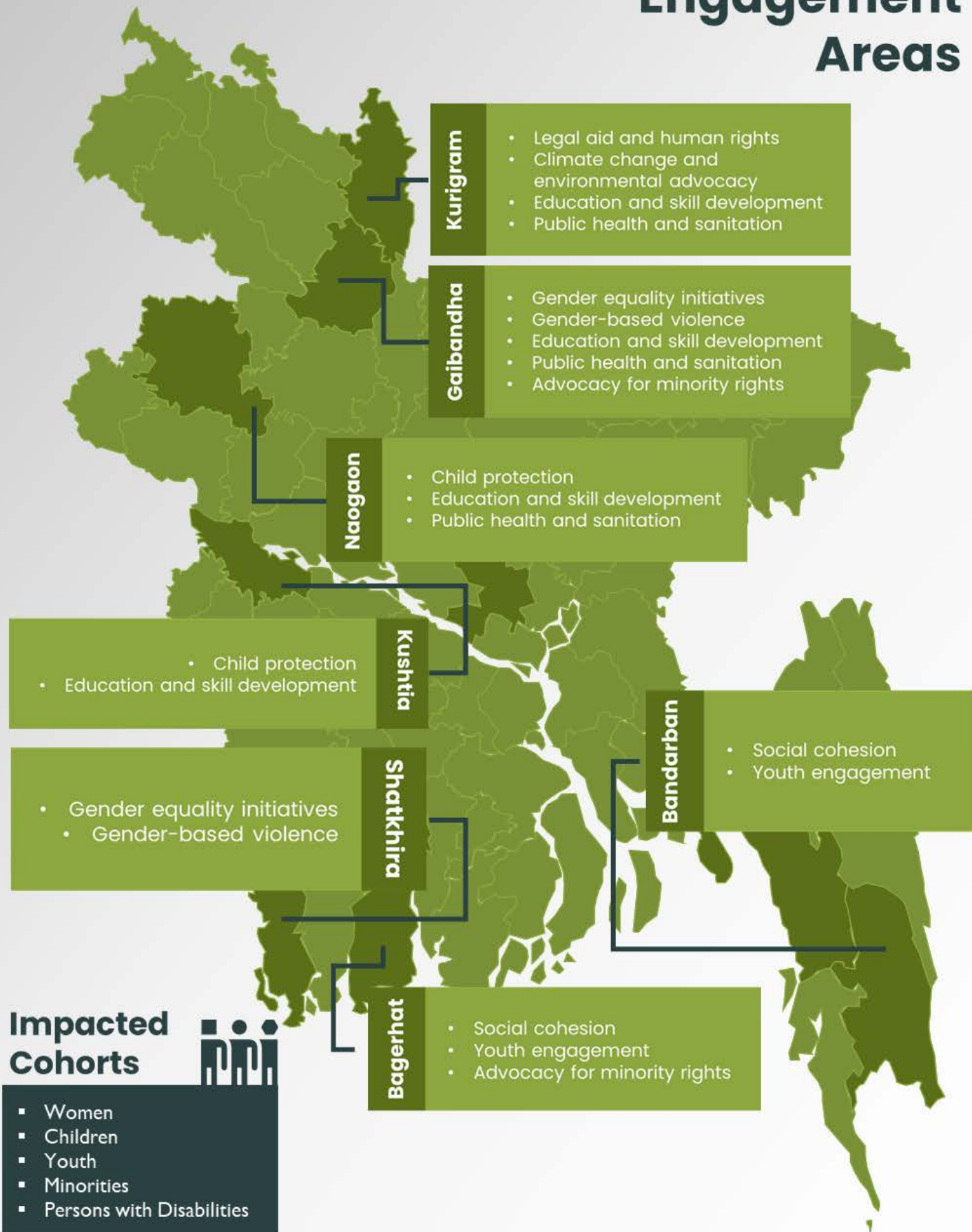
CSOs in Bangladesh focus on women's rights, child rights, social cohesion, youth empowerment, minority rights, and legal aid, with regional priorities tailored to local needs. CSOs of Satkhira and Gaibandha focus on gender equality initiatives that empower women and marginalized groups, tackling gender-based violence. CSOs of Kushtia and Naogaon emphasize child protection and education, while CSOs of Bandarban and Bagerhat prioritize social cohesion and youth engagement due to ethnic diversity and post-conflict dynamics.

Advocacy for minority rights thrives in CSOs of Bagerhat and Gaibandha, supporting indigenous and marginalized communities, while CSOs of Kurigram and Gaibandha focus on legal aid and human rights. Climate change and environmental advocacy are essential in areas affected by

climate displacement, where CSOs provide resilience training and support for vulnerable families. CSOs also prioritize disability support through education and skill development to enable financial independence and improve public health and sanitation in districts like Gaibandha, Kurigram, and Naogaon.

These organizations cater to a broad range of beneficiaries, including women, children, youth, minorities, and persons with disabilities, addressing immediate community needs and fostering long-term resilience. This positions them as valuable partners for private sector collaborations to amplify CSR efforts and drive sustainable development.

Overview of CSOs Engagement Areas



Private Sector Engagement

Private Sector Motivations for CSR



Adherence to Government Guidelines



Influencing the business environment



Branding and marketing enrichment



Building relationships with government



Parent company mandates



Market and value chain development

Private sector organizations in Bangladesh engage in CSR for a variety of strategic reasons. Adherence to government guidelines is a key driver, with financial institutions aligning their CSR activities to comply with Bangladesh Bank's Sustainable Finance Policy, which mandates distribution of CSR funds among specific thematic areas. Building relationships with the government through contributions to state-managed funds also strengthens public relations and goodwill for private sector, creating pathways for future partnerships.

Another motivation is influencing the business environment; collaborating with pressure groups can enhance regulatory influence and improve market positioning. Parent company directives also play a significant role, as subsidiaries are often required to align local CSR efforts with overarching global strategies, ensuring consistency and market relevance. Enhancing brand image through CSR initiatives is a crucial strategy that helps build consumer trust and loyalty, fostering engagement with socially impactful campaigns. Finally, the goal of market and value chain development drives companies, particularly in the consumer goods sector, through providing in-kind product support. This approach addresses community needs while reinforcing brand presence in emerging markets, contributing to both business growth and social goodwill.

Private companies employ diverse CSR strategies tailored to their goals, often favoring cash donations but also offering in-kind or logistical support when appropriate. CSR contributions include funding, grants, sponsorships, scholarships, and in-kind support such as training, logistical services, consumer products, and medical supplies. The study identifies three main CSR contribution models: cash, in-kind, and a hybrid of both. Cash contributions are often directed toward scholarships and microfinance programs, while in-kind support encompasses customized goods and services. Many companies adopt a blended approach, aligning their contributions with the specific needs of each initiative for maximum impact.

Opportunities for Strengthening Partnerships



Disaster Management and Relief

Nationally, telecommunications companies and large corporations prioritize digital literacy and technical training as part of their CSR initiatives. Collaborating with CSOs that focus on educational projects can help bridge skill gaps, enhance workforce readiness, and promote community engagement.



Healthcare and Social Welfare

Financial institutions and pharmaceutical companies, guided by structured CSR policies, have a strong focus on healthcare. Partnering with CSOs experienced in public health interventions can facilitate large-scale community health programs that align with both corporate goals and local needs.



Education and Skill Development

National and district-level FMCG companies prioritize disaster response as part of their CSR strategy, often through in-kind donations. CSOs in disaster-prone regions like Satkhira and Gaibandha can serve as effective partners in coordinating relief efforts, leveraging their local networks to maximize impact.



Community Development and Inclusion

Nationally, private sector actors are showing increased interest in sustainability, aligning with global trends and ESG mandates. CSOs in regions such as Kurigram and Naogaon, with expertise in climate advocacy and resilience programs, can partner with these companies to execute impactful environmental initiatives.



Environmental Sustainability and Climate Resilience

Large national corporations and local businesses are increasingly looking to enhance social impact through partnerships. CSOs working on social cohesion and inclusion, especially in regions like Bandarban and Bagerhat, offer opportunities for private firms to support diverse and marginalized communities, advancing social equity and development.



We frequently collaborate with INGOs because we are familiar with their capacity and trust their management quality. However, we lack similar knowledge about CSOs, including their capabilities and track record, which makes it challenging to partner with them due to this lack of awareness.

- Respondent from private sector

CSO Strengths



Community Engagement:

CSOs in Bangladesh have a significant grassroots presence and are deeply embedded in local communities, allowing them to address specific needs effectively and mobilize community resources.



Specialized Knowledge and Expertise:

Grassroots CSOs often have specialized knowledge of local issues and cultural contexts, enabling them to design and implement effective community-based interventions.



Adaptability and Resilience:

Despite financial and bureaucratic challenges, CSOs have shown resilience in continuing their work and adapting to evolving needs. Their ability to pivot and engage in disaster relief and emergency response showcases their strength in crisis management.



Key actors in influencing policy advocacy:

CSOs have been key actors in garnering public opinion from grassroots levels for policy changes and influencing governance, particularly in areas like human rights, gender equality, and environmental sustainability.



Promotion of Social Change:

Innovative and informed hyper localized initiatives focused on empowerment, education, and skill development are addressing specific societal needs and supporting marginalized groups such as women, children, and persons with disabilities.



Many CSOs in the remote rural locations don't even have a bank account to manage their finances... businesses prefer to conduct transactions through bank accounts instead of Bkash.

- District Coordinator, Bagerhat

Recommendations

In order to build stronger engagement with private sector and create sustainable impact in achieving development goals, here are the recommendations on the next course of action:



Create a strong platform for CSO partners and private sector partners:

To bridge CSOs and the private sector, a platform led by a coalition of INGOs can bolster CSO's capacity. This platform would serve as a resource for comprehensive training, focusing on project design, financial management, and monitoring tools. Additionally, it would facilitate workshops on communication and networking, enhancing CSOs' operational effectiveness and matching private sector's expectation of proposal. This platform would also include private sector partners to exchange technical knowledge and improve the capacity of CSOs by period interactions with the private sector. This platform would be aimed at creating a reliable pool of partners, boosting confidence among private sector actors and encouraging sustainable, impactful collaborations.



Create Value for Partnership Proposals:

To align CSO project proposals with private sector's requirement, developing a standardized, indicator-based template that is easy to customize can benefit CSOs in delivering well-structured project ideas. The template can be developed through a workshop with participants from CSO members and trainers with expertise in creating grant/funding proposals. The workshops would guide CSOs in understanding private sector terminologies, their strategic approaches, and value generation expectations, enabling them to craft proposals that highlight shared benefits and foster sustainable partnerships. This approach enhances CSOs' professional appeal and strengthens their capacity to effectively engage with private sector actors for long-term collaborations.



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Policy Advocacy for Inclusive CSR Fund Distribution:

To promote a more inclusive CSR fund distribution, policy advocacy is essential to push for changes in Bangladesh Bank's CSR guidelines. Advocating for a mandate that requires financial institutions to allocate a portion of their CSR funds to local organizations will ensure stronger support for community-driven development.

Additionally, advocacy efforts should focus on promoting capacity-building initiatives that enhance the financial management and governance capabilities of local CSOs and NGOs. This would better equip them to manage CSR funds effectively and establish stronger partnerships with the private sector. By prioritizing these changes, Bangladesh Bank's CSR guidelines can foster more inclusive, grassroots-driven development across the country.



This report has been prepared by Inspira Advisory & Consulting Limited. Under the “Mapping Private Sectors in Bangladesh to Collaborate with the CSO Alliance Hub” Project as part of the Shushil Program.

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