



Future Health Systems
Innovations for equity



Climate health and resilience: A photovoice exploration in the Indian Sundarbans



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FHS is a research consortium working to improve access, affordability, and quality of health services for the poor

Where we work



What we work on

Each of the country studies feeds into one of three cross-cutting themes:

- Unlocking Community Capabilities (UCC)
- Stimulating Innovations
- Intervening in complex adaptive systems (CAS)

In India, FHS focuses on improving the health situation of the more than 4.5 million inhabitants of the Indian Sundarbans – a climatically vulnerable region of West Bengal. Access to health services in the region is complicated by the rough terrain and the winding tidal rivers of the deltaic region, among other things.

Through photovoice, we sought to understand how marginalised groups – women-headed households in religious minority communities – navigated health services in the Sundarbans.

About photovoice

Photovoice is a visual research methodology through which people can represent, and enhance their community by photographing their daily lives and the lives of those around them. It is a qualitative and participatory research method that aims to capture what occurs when researchers are not necessarily present.

Working with several women's groups in the Sundarbans, FHS provided a range of trainings – on how to use digital cameras, how to approach a picture subject, and getting people's consent – to study participants. In turn, the participants used the cameras provided to them to capture images that explain how a changing climate affects their daily livelihoods, barriers that exist to accessing health services, and ways that locals are adapting to these challenges.

Relationship between climate and health



Meen dhara: A costly way to make a living?

Meen dhara, or prawn seed collection, is a traditional way of making a living in the community. But dirty water is becoming more of a problem, especially for women collectors. The dirty water can get inside women, causing uterine infections.

Photographer: Bandana Haldar
(Binodhpur, Kultali)

Crab catching

Crab catching is one of the few livelihoods remaining in one community, but it's very strenuous, risky and time-consuming.

'Sometimes you get wounded, causing heavy bleeding... then you have sit quietly, waiting for your body to absorb the shock... then you can start working again.'

Photographer: Parul Bhakta
(Satyadaspur, G-Plot)



Barriers to accessing health services



A broken ferry *ghat*

This ferry landing (*ghat*) has been broken for last three months. This is the only way to cross the river. The mainland, where the nearest Public Health Centre is located, is on the other side.

Photographer: Sita Das

(Jayasree Colony, G-plot)

The cost of medicine adds up quickly for those with chronic conditions

‘I am suffering from a chronic disease... Medicines are very costly and not always available here. I have shifted to a rural medical practitioner (RMP) who gave me medicines on credit.’

Photographer: Lakkhana Debnath
(Jayasree Colony, G-Plot)



Adaptive strategies
taken by the
communities



Teenage mother cuddles a baby born at a low birth weight

‘The girls in our community often get married at the age of 13 or 14. The girl in the picture gave birth to a low-weight baby at the age of 16. Parents often marry off their daughters at an early age to reduce the number of family members. It’s a way of managing resource constraints.’

Photographer: Sipra Halдар
(Binodhpur, Kultali)

Older children as caretakers

'I leave my younger child with the older one. I know it is very risky but we have to sustain.'

Photographer: Bornali Giri
(Nogenabad, Kultali)



FHS India photovoice participants meet with the local self-government (*panchayat*) to discuss health issues highlighted through the photovoice process.



Outcomes and participants

Photovoice participants and photovoice facilitators worked together as co-researchers to understand emerging themes and research findings. They also curated exhibits to share the photovoice results with local community members.

After presenting the results, a dialogue on community-based solutions to the existing problems was initiated. The target audience provided valuable feedback on the project results and agreed to aid in the important task of reaching influential decision-makers.

The FHS India photovoice was an eye-opener for many of the participants, researchers and others in the community. It proved to be an important way to understand and identify local-level issues that had otherwise been overlooked.

Future Health Systems is a research consortium working to improve access, affordability and quality of health services for the poor. We are a partnership of leading research institutes from across the globe working in a variety of contexts: in low-income countries (Bangladesh, Uganda), middle-income countries (China, India) and fragile states (Afghanistan) to build resilient health systems for the future.

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