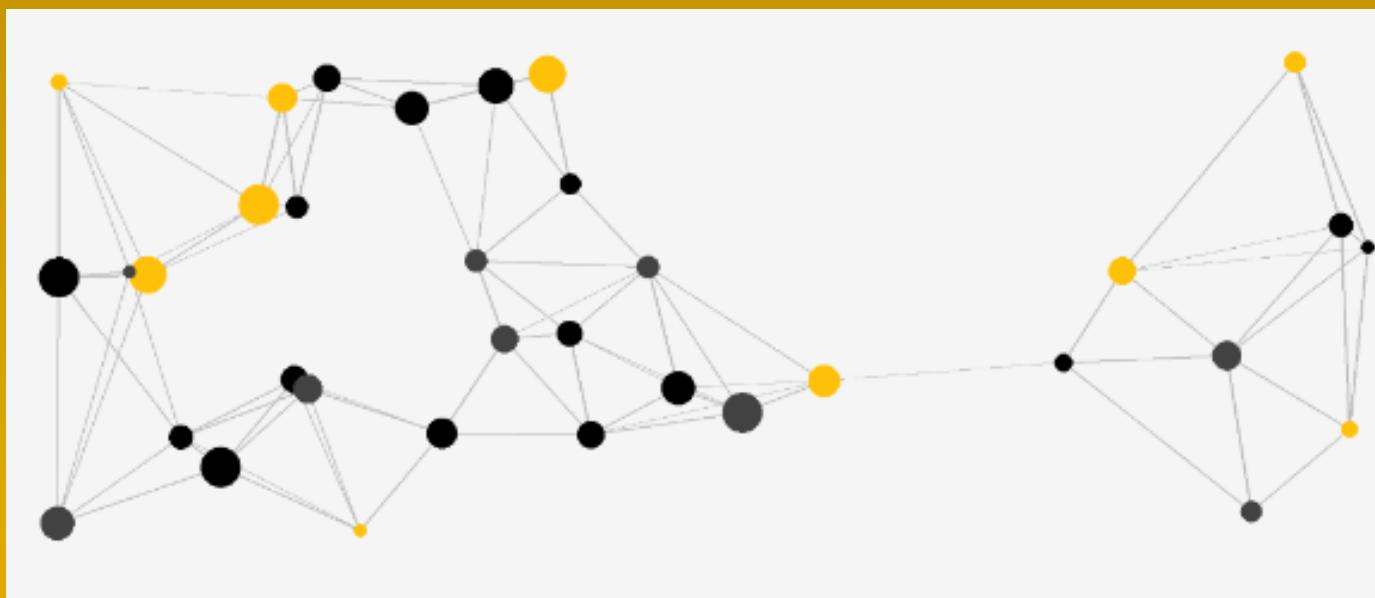


# CONTROVERSIES & DEBATES WORKING PAPERS



## Assessing governance and the empowerment of the vulnerable groups

**A relational assessment of the ALOC project**  
(Advancement of Lands rights of the Indigenous Communities)



Avec le soutien



Les idées et les opinions présentées ne représentent pas nécessairement celles de l'AFD



# Assessing governance and the empowerment of the vulnerable groups

## ***Report on the relational evaluation module of the ALOC project (Advancement of Land Rights of the Indigenous Communities)***

CoRe Program (Resilient Communities)

With the support of Secours Catholique–Caritas France, the French Development Agency, Caritas Bangladesh, and the ALOC team.

**directed by ARPOP\*- GEMDEV**

### **Authors**

Juliette Schlegel\*<sup>a</sup>, Ahmed Fouad El Haddad\*<sup>b</sup>, Alain Piveteau\*<sup>c</sup>,

Thibaud Deguilhem\*<sup>d</sup> et Jean-Philippe Berrou\*<sup>e</sup>

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\* Research group Public Policy Network Analysis

\*<sup>a</sup> Laboratoire Dynamiques Sociales et Recomposition des Espaces (UMR 7533), Université Paris Cité

\*<sup>b</sup> Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire d'Etudes du Politique Hannah Arendt de Paris Est (EA 7373), Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Fontainebleau

\*<sup>c</sup> Pôle de Recherche pour l'Organisation et la Diffusion de l'Information Géographique (UMR 8586), IRD, Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne

\*<sup>d</sup> Laboratoire d'Etude et de Recherche sur l'Economie, les Politiques et les Systèmes Sociaux (EA 4212), Sciences Po Toulouse

\*<sup>e</sup> Laboratoire les Afriques dans le Monde (UMR 5115), Sciences Po Bordeaux



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## Acronyms and abbreviations

ALOC	Advancement of Land Rights of the Indigenous Communities
ARPOP	Analyse réseau des politiques publiques
CB	Caritas Bangladesh
CoRe	Resilient Communities
GEMDEV	Groupe pour l'étude de la mondialisation et du développement
IPs	Indigenous Peoples
IWGIA	International Work Group of Indigenous Affairs
JET	Just Ecological Transition
NGO(s)	Non-governmental organisation(s)
SCCF	Secours Catholique–Caritas France
SEHD	Society for Environment and Human Development
UCGM	United Council of Greater Mymensingh

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## Summary

- ***General context of the partnership***

For nearly three years, GEMDEV (Group for the Study of Globalization and Development) has been supporting the scientific coordination of the CoRe (Communities and Resilience) program. The CoRe program, a multi-year partnership led by Secours Catholique–Caritas France (SC-CF), brings together 23 partners from 18 countries and aims to promote a just ecological transition by strengthening the capacity for action of local actors.

This document is part of the partnership between the ARPOP (Public Policy Network Analysis) team at GEMDEV and Caritas Bangladesh on the Advancement of Land Rights of Indigenous Communities (ALOC) project. This partnership, running from September 2024 to September 2025, is part of the CoRe program. Within this framework, the GEMDEV-ARPOP team has developed an experimental relational assessment module: a tool for monitoring and improving project governance, based on the analysis of networks of relationships between partners. The ALOC project, now in its third phase, was chosen as a pilot site for testing this module due to its rich network of stakeholders (community organizations, national NGOs, public institutions, etc.) and its deep roots in the territorial dynamics of land rights and ecological justice.

This document reports on the experience of the relational assessment module, from its development and implementation to the results observed and the strengths and weaknesses they reveal in the collective governance of the ALOC project.

- ***Overview of key results***

Relational assessment relies on network analysis, which maps the relationships impacting project progress: information exchange, collaboration, perceived impact of collaboration, and ideological affinity. The results include maps of the relationships between all actors identified as project stakeholders. By using measures such as centrality, density, and betweenness, it becomes possible to objectify relational mechanisms such as influence, cohesion, power, information asymmetries, and obstacles hindering effective coordination. The results also include a section on actors' perceptions of a just ecological transition and the defense of Indigenous rights, in order to assess their coherence and impact on network cohesion.

The joint interpretation of the results of the relational analysis of the ALOC-3 project's partner network identifies several obstacles and factors promoting coordination and cooperation among stakeholders. A brief summary of the results is presented here; they are detailed in Part 4 of this report.

- + A widely shared ideological foundation on the interdependence between land rights and environmental preservation
- + A moderate but sufficient relational density to ensure information flow and coordination
- + The existence of recognized bridging and central actors who can ensure inter-scale and inter-type connections
- + Participatory governance driven by local organizations, creating a committed "core group"
- Persistent asymmetries in mutual recognition and the perceived impact of collaborations
- A moderate but real segmentation between local and national scales
- Limited and peripheral engagement of government actors, despite their institutional power
- A gap between ideological convergence and effective collaboration among some actors

## • ***Key recommendations and outlook***

Based on empirical observations and contributions from collective feedback sessions, several recommendations were formulated to strengthen the governance, ideological coherence, and collective effectiveness of the ALOC project. Two major points should be considered:

- Promoting dialogue between UCGM (United Council of Greater Mymensingh), national NGOs, and local government services; and
- Promoting cross-category connections and mixed partnerships (community and national NGOs; human rights advocacy and environmental groups, etc.).

Centrality assessments revealed actors on the periphery of multiple networks (some women's groups, youth groups, local cultural associations and government bodies) who are at risk of not participating in informed decision-making and who could be more integrated into decision-making spaces. On the other hand, a recurring tendency to connect and exchange with actors of the same type (IP-led versus non-IP-led) was observed. Creating discussion spaces for dialogue between organizations operating at different levels and in different sectors could help strengthen these links, particularly between local organizations, public institutions (offices and ministries), and national NGOs. The recommendations are detailed further in section 5.2. with proposals to adjust existing practices and suggestions for new mechanisms.

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1. General context of the ALOC project

### ❖ *Socio-political context of indigenous communities in Greater Mymensingh*

Bangladesh is home to 27 indigenous communities, also called Adivasis, officially representing 1.6 million people according to the government. Indigenous organizations, however, estimate that there are around 90 communities with a population of nearly 5 million, or close to 2% of Bangladesh's population (Gain, 2011). Approximately 80% of this population resides in the northern and southeastern plains of the country, particularly in the Greater Mymensingh region, where eight ethnic communities coexist, including the Garos (Achiks), Hajongs, Kochs, and Barmans. These communities have developed unique social systems—the Garos, in particular, are organized according to a matrilineal system—which contrast sharply with the majority Bengali society (Datta and Kibria, 2025).

The relationship between indigenous communities and the land is central to their cultural identity and economic livelihood. However, a process of systemic land dispossession has developed since British colonization, with a succession of laws allowing the confiscation of minority lands. As a result, 85% of the indigenous populations in the northwestern region of Bangladesh are now landless, whereas they owned the majority of the land before the 1960s. In addition to these historical mechanisms, there are now new vectors of eviction through “development” projects financed by development banks, tourist infrastructure, military installations, and industrial and agricultural expansion (Gain, 2013). Demographic pressure and conflicts over land use are dramatically intensifying land conflicts.

The Bangladeshi legal framework constitutes a major obstacle to the recognition of indigenous rights. Indeed, the Constitution of Bangladesh does not recognize the existence of indigenous people. Only a constitutional amendment introduced in 2011 refers to these populations as “tribes, small nationalities, ethnic groups, and communities” (Article 23A of the 15th Amendment to the

Constitution) mentioning their cultural aspects but ignoring their economic and political rights, particularly land rights (IWGIA, 2025). This lack of constitutional recognition of their indigenous status prevents any effective legal claim to ancestral lands, which are generally transmitted orally (without written title deeds). Moreover, legal proceedings to challenge land dispossession are lengthy, costly, and technical. Indigenous rights organizations, such as SEHD and Minority Rights Group, also report false forest cases, which the Forestry Department abuses to intimidate and criminalize populations resisting eviction.

In addition to land insecurity, there is an ecological crisis due to land use, new agricultural practices introduced during the Green Revolution and the broader effects of climate change. As a result, there has been massive deforestation in favor of single-species plantations and degradation of soils and groundwater due to massive chemical inputs. This degradation impacts the livelihoods of indigenous populations, who depend on traditional agricultural practices (Gain, 2011, 2013). Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to climate change and is experiencing increasingly frequent natural disasters that particularly affect rural areas inhabited by indigenous populations. Socially, these communities also face multiple forms of discrimination: limited access to education, health services, and government programs, economic insecurity, and social exclusion.

It is in this context that the ALOC project (Advancement of Land Rights of Indigenous Communities) was developed.

## ❖ Overview of ALOC project

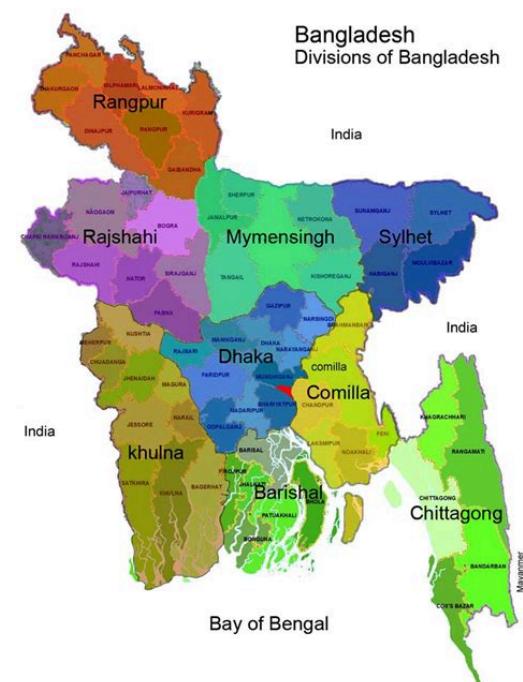
The Advancement of Land Rights of the Indigenous Communities (ALOC) project has been implemented since 2017 by Caritas Bangladesh, with the support of Secours Catholique – Caritas France as part of the CoRe program. The initiative is a continuation of the partnership established in 2014 through the ALSA (Assistance for Land Settlement of the Adivasis) project, which enabled the first participatory land mapping in the Modhupur region.

Since then, three successive phases—ALOC I (2017-2018), ALOC II (2018-2021), and ALOC III (2021-2025)—have consolidated a multi-year program to support land rights and a just ecological transition in Greater Mymensingh, in northeastern Bangladesh.

The ALOC project operates in the Greater Mymensingh region and covers 17 upazilas (subdistricts) in six districts (Tangail, Jamalpur, Sherpur, Mymensingh, Netrakona, and Sunamganj), directly benefiting nearly 16 000 inhabitants from eight indigenous communities, most of whom belong to the Garo group. These areas and their inhabitants are affected by deforestation, land conflicts, forest reserve policies, and climate vulnerability.

The overall objective of the ALOC project is to support vulnerable indigenous peoples (IPs) in the legal, social, and political recognition of their land rights, while strengthening their capacity for action in local development dynamics. The interventions combine two complementary components:

Fig 1 : Map of Bangladesh districts



Source : Media Bangladesh, 2015

- land and human rights, through advocacy, legal support, digital land mapping, and strengthening traditional indigenous organizations;
- a just ecological transition, through the promotion of agroecology, the valorization of local knowledge, and awareness-raising on sustainable natural resource management.

Achieving these goals is a challenge that requires cooperation between national-level assistance and local and community groups to exchange knowledge and establish networks. In a context marked by land, legal, and cultural pressure on IPs and their increased vulnerability to climate change, ALOC aims to create an integrated model of local governance that reconciles social, ecological, and land justice. It acts as a multi-stakeholder coordination framework bringing together community organizations within the United Council of the Indigenous Organizations of Greater Mymensingh (UCGM), national NGOs, public institutions, and academic partners. The project is both a framework for collective advocacy and territorial innovation, experimenting with local responses to the social and environmental crisis, and contributes to the dissemination of principles and practices associated with just ecological transition framework in Bangladesh.

## ***1.2. Objectives of the relational assessment module***

The relational assessment module is an experimental approach to monitoring and improving project governance. Designed as a tool for analyzing coordination and cooperation dynamics, it aims to complement traditional monitoring and evaluation approaches focused on activities and their effects by examining the quality of relationships between stakeholders, the flow of information, resources, and ideas, and the mechanisms of influence and power that result. The overall objective of the module is to promote inclusive and resilient governance within the ALOC project by enabling stakeholders to visualize, understand, and master, in order to improve their mutual relations in the conduct of the project. Specifically, the module has the following objectives:

1. **Map inter-organizational relationships** between project stakeholders according to four dimensions: information sharing, operational collaboration, perceived impact of collaborations, and ideological affinity;
2. **Identify asymmetries** or imbalances in communication, power, or recognition that influence the effective participation of different stakeholder groups;
3. **Assess the degree of consistency** and convergence of visions among indigenous organizations, national NGOs, administrations, and international partners around the Just Ecological Transition (JET), and more specifically its manifestations in the ALOC project (defense of land rights, environmental protection, social justice);
4. **Strengthen the collective governance** of the project by producing relational indicators that promote transparency, planning, dialogue, and institutional strengthening;
5. **Test a reproducible evaluation model** that can be integrated into the monitoring and evaluation systems of Caritas Bangladesh and SCCF programs.

## ***1.3. Stakeholders and participants***

The relational assessment covers all stakeholders involved in the implementation and governance of the ALOC-3 project (including beneficiaries and local and national partners). After defining the political arena through a participatory workshop conducted jointly with the ALOC teams (cf. Appendix 1, p.37), 51 partner organizations have been identified. These include:

- Indigenous community organizations, grouped together within a common platform of local IP organizations called UCGM. These include organizations working at the grassroots level such as traditional social organizations, student organizations, financial organizations, women-led organizations, cultural organizations, lawyers' groups, and church-based organizations. These structures form the core of the project's local governance network.
- Like-minded partner organizations, mainly national NGOs active in the areas of land rights, social justice, and ecological transition.
- Local institutional representatives from government agencies (Forest, Land, Agricultural, and Livestock Offices) and ministries (Land and Agriculture) associated with the institutionalization of the project's objectives.
- Civil society and academic actors involved in research, awareness-raising, or advocacy for the rights of indigenous peoples and the environment.

## 2. Partnership structure and implementation

The implementation of the ALOC project's relational evaluation module required scientific, institutional, and logistical preparation, carried out jointly by the ARPOP–GEMDEV, ALOC, and SCCF teams between September 2024 and September 2025. The protocol combines scientific work, local participation, and co-interpretation, thus considering local actors as co-evaluators of the project rather than mere respondents.

### 2.1. Preparation and logistics

#### ❖ *Device design and institutional coordination*

The module began with a series of scoping meetings between ARPOP–GEMDEV, ALOC and SCCF managers. These discussions made it possible to:

- Ensure that the various partners understood the module, which focuses on the relationships between actors, and define its analytical and learning objectives
- Agree on the coordination arrangements between the scientific (GEMDEV), operational (ALOC), and institutional (Caritas Bangladesh and SCCF) teams
- Share expectations and constraints for implementing the module in order to adapt it to the local context.

A joint steering group was set up to monitor the implementation of the module, composed of representatives from Caritas Bangladesh (Mymensingh Region and headquarters), members of GEMDEV, and SCCF representatives. This group validated the data collection tools and planned the field missions.

#### ❖ *Practical preparation and data collection tools*

Based on preliminary discussions, the research team developed a relational survey protocol combining quantitative (network analysis), qualitative (open-ended questions and text corpus), and participatory (group exercises and activities) approaches. Data collection took the form of a questionnaire comprising a so-called "sociometric" section which aimed to collect data on the four types of relationships studied (information flow, cooperation, perception of influence, ideological affinity); and an interview guide consisting of open and closed-ended questions to collect data on

the typology of actors included in the network, the belief system and ideologies at work (actors' perception of the ALOC project).

Preparatory training was provided to ALOC staff at the beginning of the first field mission in order to harmonize understanding of the interview guides and data processing by researchers and to adapt the questionnaire to the local context. This session focused on presenting the survey materials and their mechanisms. More advanced training was provided to staff members who assisted with the questionnaires as translators and who took over the interviews with organizations that were not interviewed during the first field mission.

### ❖ *Logistics and mission planning*

Field logistics were handled by Caritas Bangladesh – Mymensingh Region. The main arrangements focused on:

- travel planning and selection of survey sites;
- assignment of mixed teams (researchers – ALOC staff) to collect data from the 51 partner organizations;
- material and logistical management: transportation, accommodation, local authorizations;
- linking with representatives of the organizations to collect data.

ARPOP-GEMDEV took charge of the logistics for the feedback workshop:

- planning participants travel arrangements;
- material and logistical management: transport, accommodation;
- organizing meetings between researchers, ALOC representatives, and SCCF.

## **2.3. Partnership schedule**

Table 1 : Partnership schedule

Preparatory phase	Review of ALOC project documentation to understand its context, objectives, developments, management approach, etc.
September–December 2024	Preliminary identification and classification of stakeholders Development of a data collection protocol and interview guides
Field data collection phase February–March 2025	Participatory workshops to map perceived relationships and define the arena of relevant actors.  Conducting 40 interviews (out of 51 identified organizations), combining relational data and qualitative perceptions. Active involvement of ALOC staff (training in administering the questionnaire, translation and support for researchers, participation in developing interview guides).
Analysis and processing phase	Modeling and production of network indicators.  Processing of textual data and production of statistical indicators.

April–June 2025	Preparation of visual and educational materials for collective presentation.
Feedback and participatory discussion phase	Presentation of results in the form of interpretation notebooks (Collective Restitution Notebooks)
July– September 2025	Feedback session with ALOC project employees to discuss results and formulate recommendations.

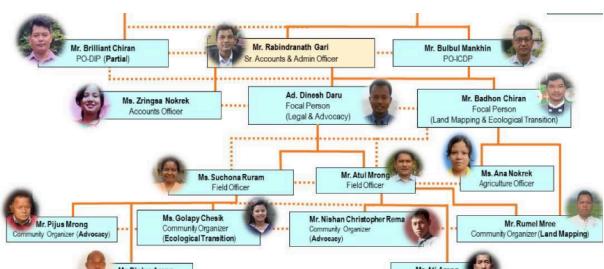
## 2.4. Composition of participants

Throughout the relational evaluation process for the ALOC-3 project, stakeholders and organizations representing the main components of the project's governance structure were involved: project staff, community organizations, direct and indirect partners, and institutions linked to the issues raised.

There are two main categories of stakeholders involved in the system: logistical, operational, and institutional supporters, and the project stakeholders surveyed.

### ❖ Parties involved in logistical, operational, and institutional support

Table 2 : Logistical, operational and institutional supports

Parties	Support	Details
Representatives of Caritas Bangladesh Regional Office - Mymensingh region	Institutional supervision and logistical support	Mr. Daud Jibon Das Mr. Apurbo Mrong Mr. Camillus Kamol Gandhai Ms. Rosey Rongma
Representatives of Secours Catholique-Caritas France	Partnership support and monitoring	Ms. Maria Jose Chanut Ms. Jessica Lempereur
ALOC project staff	Active participation in the successive phases of the module	
GEMDEV-ARPOP Staff	Scientific supervision and management of module phases	Mr. Alain Piveteau Mr. Ahmed Fouad El Haddad Ms. Juliette Schlegel Mr. Jean-Philippe Berrou Mr. Thibaud Deguilhem

❖ *List of actors included in the relational analysis*

Table 3: List of the 51 actors present and active in the ALOC-3 project

<b>Social organizations (9)</b>	ID	type
Bangladesh Jatio Hajong Organization	BAJHO	UCGM
Bangladesh Kuch Adivasi Unnayan Parishod	BAKAUP	UCGM
Community Based Advocacy and Networking Committee	CBANC	partner
Hajong Mata Rashimony Unnayan Parishod	HMRUP	UCGM
Joyanshahi Adivasi Unnayan Parishad	JAUP	UCGM
Land Management Committee	LMC	partner
<i>Nijera Kori</i>	<i>NijeraKori</i>	<i>partner</i>
Rahi Hajong	RAHA	UCGM
Tribal Welfare Association	TWA	UCGM
<b>Student/youth organizations (6)</b>	ID	type
Abima Garo Youth Association	AGYA	UCGM
Adivasi Chhatro Songothon of Jatio Kabi Kazi Nazrul Islam University	AJKKNIUO	UCGM
Bangladesh Hajong Students Organization	BAHACHAS	UCGM
Bangladesh Garo Students Organization	BAGACHAS	UCGM
Garo Students Union	GASU	UCGM
Mikrakbo	Mikrakbo	UCGM
<b>Financial organizations (3)</b>	ID	type
Cooperative Credit Union	CCU	UCGM
Cooperative Credit Union League of Bangladesh	CCULB	UCGM
Friends Club	Friends	UCGM
<b>Women organizations (4)</b>	ID	type
Abima Michik Association	AMA	UCGM
A.chik Michik Society	AMS	UCGM
A.chik Women Association	AWA	UCGM
Garo Women's Federation of Greater Mymensingh	WFGM	UCGM
<b>Rights defence groups (8)</b>	ID	type
Association for Land Reform and Development	ALRD	partner
Bangladesh Indigenous Lawyers Association	BILA	UCGM
<i>Bangladesh Legal Aid and Services Trust</i>	<i>BLAST</i>	<i>partner</i>
Greater Mymensingh Adivasi Development Committee	GMADC	UCGM
Indigenous People Development Service	IPDS	partner
Indigenous Peoples Forum	IPF	partner
<i>Kapaeeng Foundation</i>	<i>KF</i>	<i>partner</i>

<i>National Coalition of Indigenous Peoples</i>	<i>NCIP</i>	<i>partner</i>
<b>Cultural organizations (6)</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>type</b>
A.chik Band CCommunity of Bangladesh	ABCB	UCGM
<i>Achik Cultural Development and Preservation Parishod</i>	<i>ACDPP</i>	<i>UCGM</i>
Bangladesh Achik Culture and Literary Parishad	BACLP	UCGM
Garo Cultural Academy	GCA	UCGM
Garo Researcher, Writer and Poet Council of Greater Mymensingh	GRWPCGM	UCGM
Mreettika Prokashona Organization	MPO	UCGM
Re Re	ReRe	UCGM
<b>Religious organizations (3)</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>type</b>
<i>Caritas Bangladesh</i>	<i>CB</i>	<i>partner</i>
Justice and Peace Commission	J&PC	UCGM
Parish Council	Parish	UCGM
<b>Government organizations (5)</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>type</b>
<i>Forest ministry</i>	<i>ForestM</i>	<i>partner</i>
Forest office	ForestO	partner
Government agricultural office	AgriO	partner
<i>Land ministry</i>	<i>LandM</i>	<i>partner</i>
Land office	LandO	partner
Livestock office	LiveO	partner
<b>Environmental organizations (4)</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>type</b>
Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association	BELA	partner
<i>Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon</i>	<i>BAPA</i>	<i>partner</i>
<i>Protecting The Environment And Natural Resource Management</i>	<i>BPENRM</i>	<i>partner</i>
Society for Environment and Human Development	SEHD	partner
<b>Academic organization (1)</b>	<b>ID</b>	<b>type</b>
Bangladesh Agricultural University	BAU	partner

## 3. Methodological approach

### 3.1. Overview of ALOC's relationship evaluation

The relational analysis of the ALOC project adopts a “whole network” approach—also known as *sociocentric*—which aims to map all the relationships between all the actors identified as project stakeholders. This approach makes it possible to analyze the collective governance structure of the project and identify coordination mechanisms. Three complementary approaches are used in the methodology: (i) a quantitative approach, based on network analysis and the calculation of structural and relational indicators; (ii) a qualitative dimension, based on text analysis to understand perceptions, ideological convergences and divergences between actors; (iii) a

participatory dimension, involving project actors in the co-construction of data collection tools, the interpretation of results and the formulation of recommendations.

Four types of networks were studied, corresponding to four key relational dimensions for project governance: the information exchange network (circulation of reports, newsletters, advice, informations), the operational collaboration network (technical or legal support, joint participation in activities), the perceived impact network of collaborations (subjective assessment of the value of partnerships), and the ideological affinity network (convergence of visions regarding just ecological transition and land rights). Comparing these four networks makes it possible to identify consistencies and inconsistencies between the different dimensions of the relationship (for example, actors may collaborate without sharing the same vision, or conversely, share a common vision without actually collaborating).

### ***3.2. Methodology of the participatory approach***

The ALOC project's relational assessment process was designed as a participatory mechanism in which project stakeholders are involved in collective validation sessions, alternating with scientific analysis phases. This approach is in line with the GEMDEV-ARPOP philosophy: making evaluation a space for collective reflection, promoting the co-construction of governance solutions. It is based on the idea that evaluation is not an external operation, but a learning process in which the organizations involved contribute. Four levels of involvement structured this approach:

#### *1. Interview framework*

- “Net-map” workshop (cf. Appendix 1) (Schiffer, and Douglas, 2008), is a participatory mapping exercise to adjust the composition of the network and identify key players. This workshop allows researchers to validate the list of stakeholders identified in advance based on documents and discussions with ALOC and SCCF.
- Revision of the interview guide in collaboration with ALOC staff to ensure that the questions are clear and adapted to the local context and to review the translation.

#### *2. Data collection*

- The questionnaires were administered jointly by researchers and ALOC staff members, who translated the exchanges when necessary, enabling respondents to understand the objectives and methods of the survey more easily, despite the language barrier.
- The ALOC teams took charge of data collection from the remaining organizations, demonstrating their mastery of the method and their growing autonomy.

#### *3. Interpretation of the results*

- ALOC employees were invited to fill out the “Collective Restitution Notebook,” combining graphics, indicators, and writing spaces. Participants were invited to record their observations, critical comments, and proposals as a group, enabling them to contribute to giving meaning to the results and to appropriate them in a bottom-up approach.

#### *4. Recommendations*

A participatory workshop was held to present and discuss the analyses produced during the evaluation—by ALOC-III employees and researchers—and collectively interpret their meaning in order to identify levers for improving project governance. The workshop has two main objectives :

- Transform analyses into strategic guidelines by: identifying ways to strengthen inter-organizational cohesion and coordination; improve the inclusion of peripheral actors in the flow of information and in decision-making spaces; reach the audiences and organizations that will enable the project's objectives to be achieved; etc.
- Organize a feedback session from ALOC staff and management, particularly on the relevance of this module and the potential for its integration into project monitoring and evaluation toolkits.

The participatory workshops were run jointly by researchers from GEMDEV-ARPOP (responsible for scientific rigor and teaching analysis) and ALOC staff (responsible for cultural mediation, local coordination, and translation). This methodology aims to fully involve project stakeholders in the evaluation process, from defining the network to formulating recommendations, and making the relational analysis more accessible to non-specialist audiences.

### ***3.3. Implementation of the evaluation***

To identify stakeholders involved in the ALOC-3 project, we rely on two complementary strategies. An initial list of organizations was drawn up based on official project documents (narrative reports, lists of activities and events, documentation for the SCCF, presentations), enabling the identification of UCGM members and like-minded partner organizations. Then a participatory mapping exercise inspired by the Schiffer method was organized with ALOC project staff to reconstruct the project's networks of relationships (Schiffer and Douglas, 2008). This workshop made it possible to validate the relevance of the organizations identified upstream, identify any gaps, and obtain an initial overview of the influence of certain actors.

In the end, 51 organizations were selected as stakeholders in the ALOC project, including 30 members of the UCGM and 21 partner organizations.

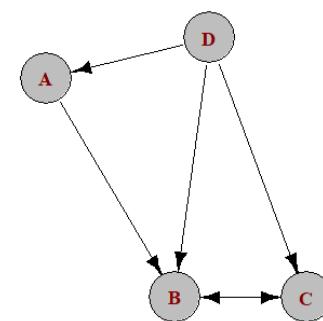
Once the respondents had been identified, the collection of data regarding organizations relationships and views was based on a survey questionnaire developed in collaboration with ALOC staff. It combines a nominalist approach (imposing a conceptual framework tailored to the evaluation objectives) and a realistic approach (taking into account the actors' own perceptions of the network). The questionnaire comprises two main sections. A so-called "sociometric" section in which respondents were asked to evaluate four dimensions of their relationships with each of the other organizations in the network. And a qualitative section consisting in open-ended and closed-ended questions providing information on the identity of the respondent and the organization (seniority, field of activity, etc.), perceptions of the ALOC project (issues, consistency of the various objectives, obstacles to implementation, suggestions for improvement) and the identification of the organizations considered to be the most influential. The questionnaire was translated into Bengali to facilitate understanding by respondents. Data collection was conducted jointly by researchers from the ARPOP-GEMDEV team and ALOC staff members. And a total of 41 of the 51 organizations identified were surveyed, representing a response rate of 80%:

- 29 of the 30 UCGM members responded (97%)
- 12 of the 21 partner organizations responded (57%)

Finally, the analysis of the data required several formatting steps. Relational data were structured in the form of matrices for each type of relationship (information, collaboration, perceived impact, ideological affinity), then modelized into networks using RStudio software. Attributes were added to the actors (type of organization, scope of action) to enable comparative analysis. The quantitative analysis of the networks mobilized the indicators presented in the following section.

Fig. 2.1 : Transformation of matrix into graph

	Actor A	Actor B	Actor C	Actor D
Actor A	0	0	0	1
Actor B	1	0	1	1
Actor C	0	1	0	1
Actor D	0	0	0	0



Source : Authors

The qualitative data in Bengali were translated into English. Responses to closed questions were incorporated into data tables to specify the organizations' orientations. Open-ended questions were subjected to content analysis (to highlight recurring themes and concepts), supplemented by lexicometric analysis using Iramuteq software (production of descriptive statistics on vocabulary, co-occurrences, semantic networks) in order to identify ideological convergences/divergences regarding the main issues perceived, the obstacles encountered, and the proposals.

The mixed methodology adopted combines quantitative, qualitative, and participatory dimensions, aiming to produce an analysis that is both rigorous and accessible to project stakeholders, in line with the objectives of the relational analysis module.

### **3.4. Social Network Analysis : Framework and main concepts**

Social Network Analysis (SNA) is a set of methods, concepts, and theories used to study the relationships between individuals and the structures they form. The unit of analysis is the set consisting of individuals or organisations and their relationships (Mercklé, 2004), which illustrate the contact between actors and involve forms of mutual knowledge and commitment. A social network is thus defined as a set of social relationships, which can be understood as "reciprocal acquaintance and commitment based on interactions and permitting the flow of resources" (Grossetti & Barthe, 2008: 587). SNA aims to describe the structure of relationships and study their relational and structural properties, as well as their influence on individual and collective behavior. This approach makes it possible to identify key actors, understand the dynamics of power and influence, and analyze the mechanisms of coordination and cooperation within a group. In the context of the ALOC project, network analysis makes it possible to map the relationships between partner organizations according to several dimensions (information exchange, collaboration, perceived impact of the collaboration and ideological affinity) and to identify the strengths and weaknesses of collective governance.

A social network is composed of individuals or organizations (also called "nodes" in graph theory) connected to each other by social ties (also called "degrees"). These links can illustrate various kinds of relationships and can be directed (oriented from one individual to another) or undirected. They can also be weighted, i.e., carry a measure of the intensity or frequency of the relationship—in the case of our study, the intensity ranges from 1 - weak relationship - to 3 - strong relationship. The shape of a network has important implications for governance and the coordination between actors. In particular, it provides insight into how resources flow. We use several indicators to describe the overall structure of a network.

**The Density** measures the connectivity rate of the network, meaning the number of existing relationships out of the total possible relationships: a dense network indicates a high level of interconnection between actors.

**Reciprocity** indicates the proportion of mutual relationships, i.e., links where two actors recognize and engage with each other.

Fig. 2.2 : Network density illustration

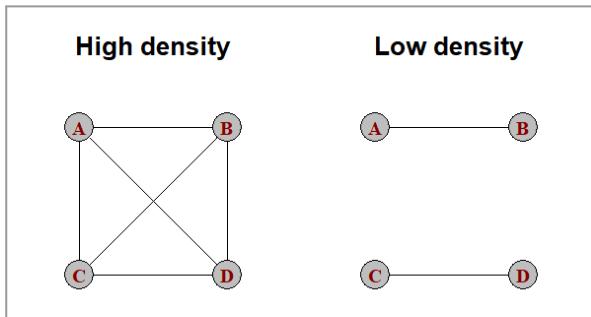
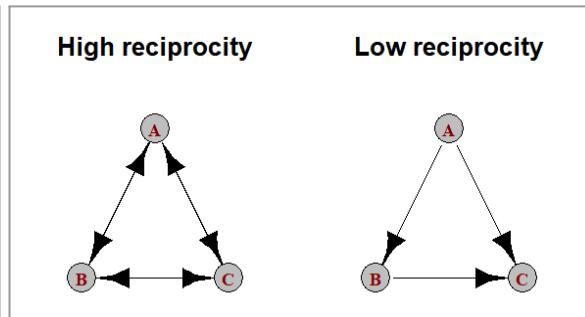


Fig. 2.3 : Network reciprocity illustration



Source : Authors

**The clustering coefficient** (or transitivity) measures the tendency to form “triangles”: if A is linked to B and B is linked to C, what is the probability that A is also linked to C? This phenomenon reflects the formation of cohesive subgroups within the network.

**The E-I index** (External-Internal) measures within-group similarity on a specific characteristic. We use it to measure the tendency of actors within the same group (e.g., UCGM members, or student/youth organizations) to favor relationships among themselves rather than with actors from other groups.

**Cluster detection** allows us to identify implicit or explicit alliances and cooperation strategies between actors. We use two criteria to detect clusters: intra-group density (modularity) and similar patterns in relationships (structural equivalence).

Fig. 2.4 : Network E-I index illustration

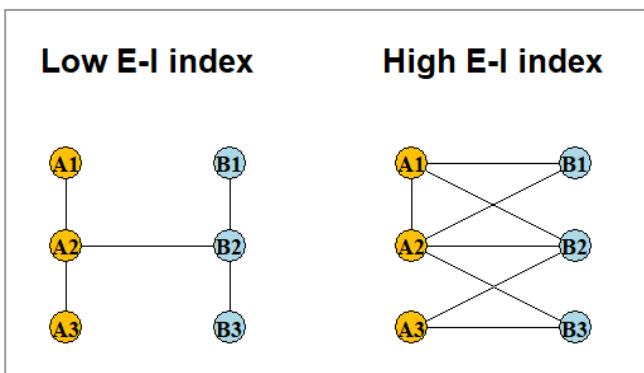
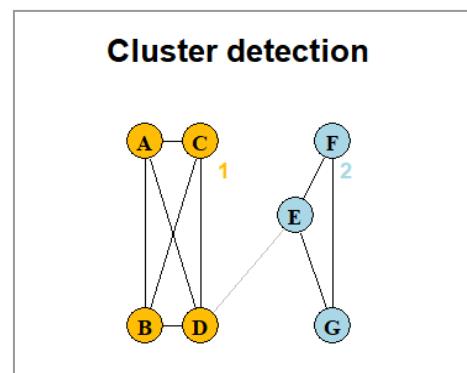


Fig. 2.5 : Network cluster illustration



Source : Authors

Finally, **cross-network comparison indicators**—degree of correspondence between the structures of one network and another, whether in terms of similar relationships or similar clusters—enable analysis of the consistencies and inconsistencies between the different relational dimensions.

Beyond the overall structure, various measures enable analysis of the position of each actor within the network, giving insight on the importance of organisations in the coordination and cooperation patterns.

**Degree centrality** measures the number and strength of relationships that an organisation engages in. In the case of directed relationships, we can distinguish between outgoing and incoming relationships, which correspond to the direction of the link between “I cite someone” and “I am cited by someone”. A highly connected organisation generally enjoys high visibility, a good reputation, and a concentration of resources depending on the type of relationship studied. Conversely, organisations who are poorly connected and peripheral risk being marginalized.

**Betweenness centrality** identifies “bridge” actors who position themselves on the shortest paths between other actors who are not directly connected. These intermediaries occupy a strategic position in the circulation of resources and ideas, as they can relay them to partners who do not know each other directly or who are more difficult to contact.

Fig. 2.6 : Degree centrality illustration

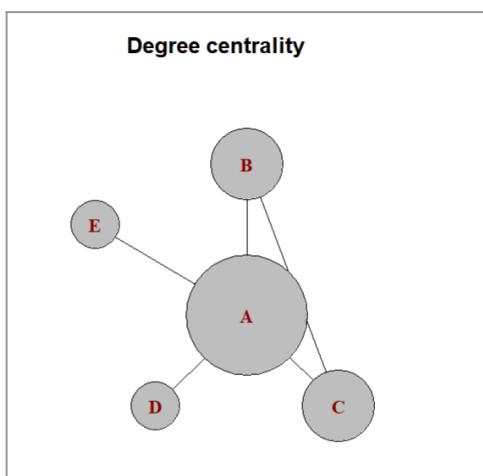
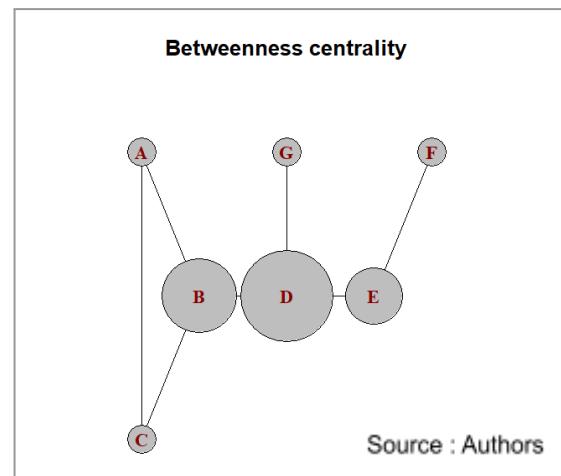


Fig. 2.7 : Betweenness centrality illustration



Source : Authors

In terms of network type, one could argue that a centralized network, structured around one or a few central actors, may be more effective for rapid information dissemination, but dependence on central actors weakens the network in the event of failure. A denser, decentralized network, with multiple connections between actors, may be more resilient and conducive to consensus building, but it can also slow down decision-making. In the absence of a “perfect network” that could serve as an example, network analysis helps identify imbalances, asymmetries in relationships, and opportunities to strengthen collective coordination.

After setting the conceptual and methodological framework and in light of the ALOC project context and implementation, five hypotheses were used to conduct the analysis. The hypothesis will serve as a general guideline to the stakeholders for interpreting the analysis results.

Table 4 : Five hypotheses about the governance structure of the ALOC-3 project in Bangladesh

H1	Given the institutional nature of the network, which brings together various actors likely to share common purposes, we expect the general form of the network to be “decentralized,” that is, composed of a large number of actors closely linked to one another.
H2	In the context of local implementation of the project, where the participants and beneficiaries are predominantly members of indigenous communities, it is expected that indigenous-led organizations will play a central role in governance.

H3	On the other hand, regional offices of administrations and national NGOs may be brokers between local stakeholders and the central government.
H4	Regarding the objectives of the ALOC-3 project, the advocacy nature of the network and the majority of IP-led organisations composing it, we expect a large coalition defending different aspects of IPs way of life (rights, culture, environment).
H5	Conversely, with regard to the socio-economic and political situations of the indigenous people in Bangladesh, government bodies may be less involved in the project and share different points of view than the indigenous coalition.

## 4. Results of the relational analysis

In this section, we examine the overall structure and positions of actors within the ALOC-3 project's inter-organizational network through four dimensions of actor relationships identified by the sociometric survey: collaboration, information sharing, perceived impact of collaboration, and ideological homophily (shared viewpoints). We aim to analyze the form of governance, the centrality of actors, and the existence of coalitions in order to test our five working hypotheses.

It should be noted that the questionnaire was conducted among 40 of the 51 organizations identified as project stakeholders, giving us a response rate of 80%—respectively 97% of UCGM members and 57% of partner organizations. The absent organizations are mainly national partners, which reflects an initial difficulty in accessing national representatives, whether from NGOs or ministries, and may suggest a more distant involvement in the project. Regarding the missing response from Ministries, we should also take into account the uncertain political context of Bangladesh with the Student-led uprising that overthrew Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's Awami League government in August 2024. Thus, Bangladesh entered 2025 under an interim government which announced elections to be held between December 2025 and June 2026. In the meantime, the political landscape remains deeply uncertain, with competing visions for reform and ongoing tensions between various political factions. The lower representation of certain actors in the analysis does not allow for a balanced dialogue between actors in the field, institutional leaders, and advocates at larger scales, and impacts the analysis as well as the formulation of recommendations.

### 4.1. Governance structure: a low-hierarchical network driven by TSOs

Networks of information sharing, collaboration and their perceived impact characterize the effective coordination structure between project stakeholders. We distinguish these from networks of ideological affinities, which are a more subjective expression of relational properties. The first three networks are particularly dense, with organizations interacting extensively with one another. Figure 3, showing the collaborative relationships, is a good illustration of this<sup>1</sup>. In line with the expectations of hypothesis 1, the emerging pattern reflects a “decentralized”<sup>2</sup> type of governance in which many organizations interact and collaborate with each other, with a central core of particularly connected actors and more distant organizations located on the periphery.

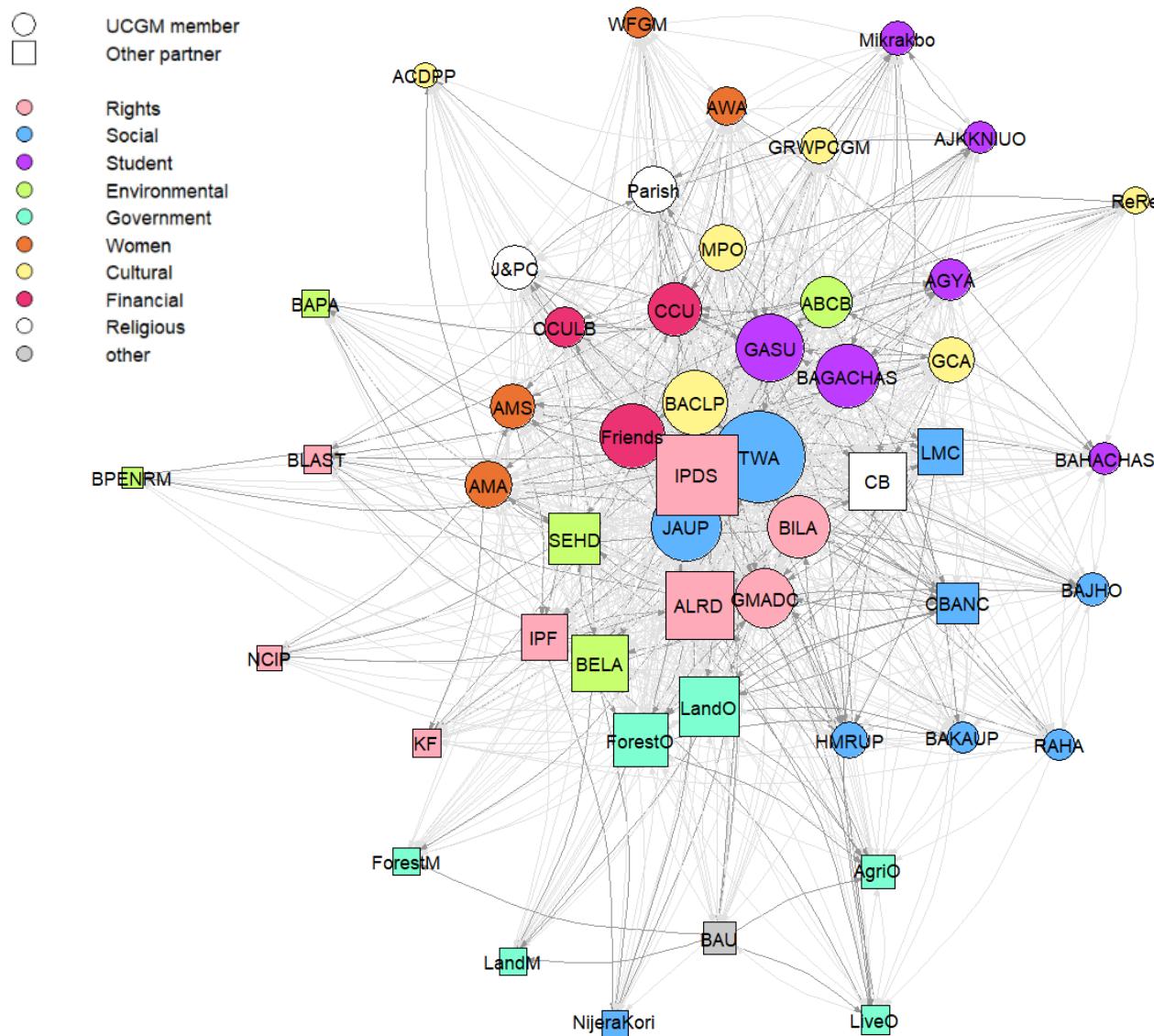
<sup>1</sup> For an illustration of information-sharing networks, impact of collaboration, and ideological affinity, see Appendix 2, p. 39.

<sup>2</sup> *Decentralized network* : a large number of actors are highly connected to each other.

*Centralized network* : structured around one or a few central actors linked to all the other actors who share only a few connections between themselves.

The three coordination networks (information, collaboration, and impact of collaboration) are relatively similar in form and raise several observations (see Table 5, p.25). Organizations vary in terms of their nature, their involvement in the project, and their areas of focus—advocacy, culture, environment, etc.—which can impact the shared understanding of the project's objectives. However, the moderately high density of interactions in the three coordination networks reflect collective action (Sciarini, 1994). On the one hand, this structure facilitates the dissemination of information, creates an environment conducive to collective action, and is positively linked to the sustainability of coalitions (Heeren and al., 2022), but paradoxically, it can lead to difficulties in governing effectively. Indeed, the average distance between actors is small, which can lead to information redundancy and complicate the integration of peripheral actors' voices due to more limited connections to external information and resources (Burt, 1992; Valente et al., 2007).

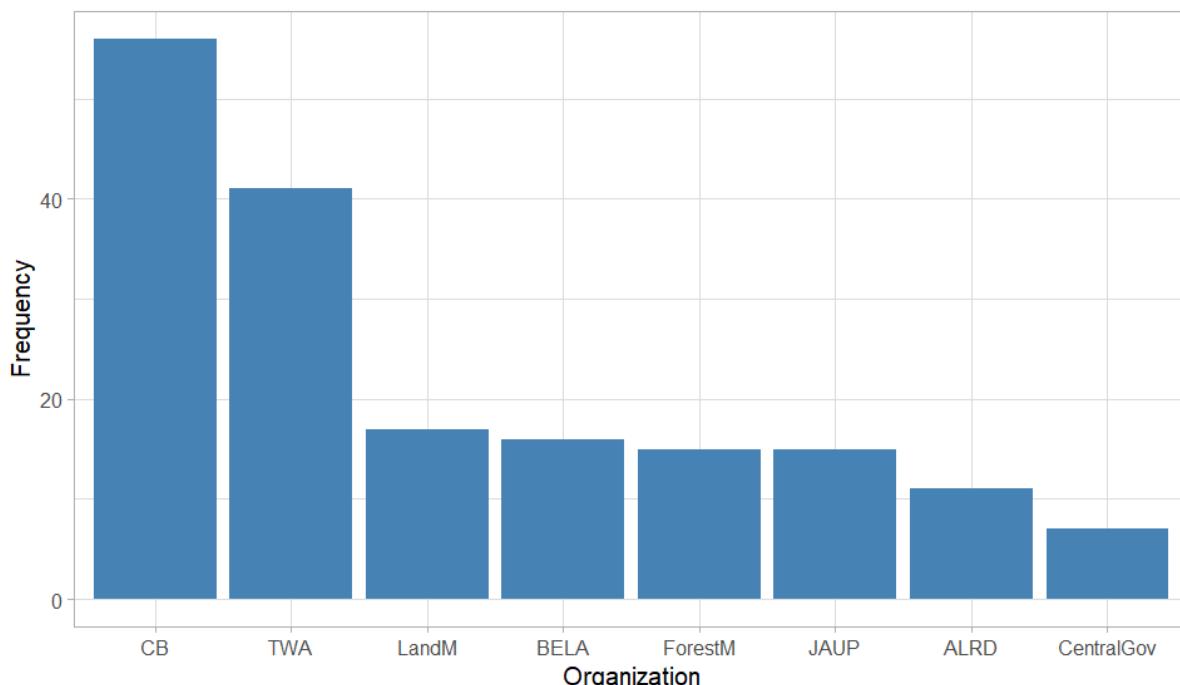
Figure 3 : Collaboration network



*Note: the strongest links (strength 3) are shown in dark gray, while weaker or moderate links (strength 1 and 2) are shown in light gray. It can be seen that a significant proportion of relationships are perceived as moderately strong. The distribution of link strength in the networks can be found in Appendix 3 ,p. 41.*

One might think that the proliferation of relationships between a large number of actors is indicative of a leadership deficit, but an examination of the central and influential actors puts this assertion into perspective by revealing organizations that are “pilot” or recognized as “leaders” by their peers. This observation must be put into perspective due to the lack of response from some of the organizations operating at the national level, but it remains true, at least for the local organizations and associations grouped under the UCGM designation. One initial observation stands out from the analysis. Regardless of the indicator selected, the same central organizations are found systematically, or almost systematically, in all three networks such as CB, TWA, GASU, or JAUP (see Table 6, p.25). It should also also be noted that actors considered influential in pursuing the objectives of the ALOC project, such as local administrations and the central government, do not occupy a central position, even when only incoming links are taken into account (i.e., those cited by other organizations) (see Figure 4, p.21). This observation, when considered in conjunction with the lack of sufficient government support mentioned during interviews and found in other sources (Gain, 2011, 2013; Das and Islam, 2005; Muhammed et al., 2011; IWGIA, 2025), constitutes a major challenge given their institutional power in advancing the rights of indigenous peoples.

Figure 4 : Most Influential actors according to the stakeholders



These results raise a form of tension in the governance of the ALOC project. On the one hand, the participatory and horizontal dynamic promoted by the UCGM group is an important way of building “community capacity” (Chaskin et al., 2001); on the other hand, the emergence of leading organizations reveals a structure based around a few key players who concentrate part of the network's relational and symbolic resources. The participatory dynamic that emerges from this is one of the network's strengths, but there are some risks associated with this dual dynamic that should not be overlooked. The proliferation of interactions can illustrate a form of diffuse governance that can complicate collective decision-making capacity; and the concentration of reputational power and influence around a small number of organizations, while useful for coordination, could ultimately create imbalances if these central actors were to withdraw or lose their legitimacy (Provan & Kenis, 2008). The challenge for the ALOC project therefore lies in its ability to maintain a balance between, on the one hand, preserving a participatory and horizontal

governance model that ensures the inclusion of local organizations and, on the other hand, recognizing and strengthening the coordinating role assumed by emerging leading organizations. The aim is to strengthen the network's shared governance by effectively combining horizontality (joint participation) and cooperation (capacity to learn, to plan and address problems).

At this stage of the analysis, we may question the relationship between the coordination structure observed and the ideology and discourse associated with the project partners. Does the centrality of certain actors in terms of coordination reflect a genuine political appropriation of the issue of land rights and a just ecological transition, thus marking an assumed leadership in defining the project's vision? Or does it rather reflect a centrality that is "imposed" by the technical and institutional system that governs the daily management of the ALOC project?

Analysis of the ideological affinity network—representing relationships based on shared beliefs regarding the advancement of indigenous communities' land rights and a just ecological transition—will help to clarify these interpretations.

The ideological affinity network shows moderate cohesion (density: 38%; reciprocity: 48%), suggesting the existence of a shared ideological basis among a large number of stakeholders, allowing for a certain circulation of ideas, while also revealing pockets of isolation or ignorance. A similar structure of relationships and positions of actors can be found in the resource exchange networks seen previously and in the ideological affinity network, confirming the leading roles of CB, TWA, JAUP, GASU, and BAGACHAS in information exchange, effective collaboration, and ideological affinity relationships, sharing their views with many partners. This convergence between operational centrality and ideological centrality could indicate that these actors are not simply fulfilling a technical coordination role, but are effectively promoting a substantive vision for the project.

The Greater Mymensingh Adivasi Development Committee (GMADC), GASU, Land Office, BAGACHAS, and TWA stand out for their role as "bridges" between actors or groups that do not share a common approach to the project, or for disseminating these ideas to organizations that are not in direct contact and/or do not know each other. Their role can be crucial in a network where fragmentation and pockets of isolation remain. This raises the question of whether these bridge actors facilitate the emergence of a consensus around the project vision or if they find themselves in a position of mediating between heterogeneous visions.

More broadly, and in light of the structural analyses we have just carried out, we can question how relational structures shape perceptions of the project. Indeed, the variability of the organizations involved—whether in terms of their institutional nature, their scale of intervention, or their areas of expertise—the simultaneous density and fragmentation of their relationships according to their nature (with a cohesive central network of indigenous organizations contrasting with more marginal organizations), as well as the distinction between central actors (mainly organizations led by indigenous populations) and actors perceived as influential (CB and government actors) suggest a plurality of potentially divergent languages and perceptions around the ALOC project. How does this diversity concretely shape the way different actors define problems, envisage solutions, and plan their actions? This question can be addressed through a qualitative analysis of the open-ended survey responses.

Table 5: Overall indicators for the four networks

	Exchange of informations	Collaboration	Perceived impact	Common view/ideology	General comment
Density	0.42	0.39	0.40	0.38	Moderate level of connectivity, there are opportunities to strengthen ties between actors not yet connected.
Reciprocity	0.52	0.49	0.49	0.48	Partial asymmetry in recognition of partners.
Clustering coefficient	0.73	0.71	0.71	0.69	Actors tend to form relational triangles (ex : my collaborators collaborate with each other), which suggest a strong local cohesion and coordination within sub-groups.
E-I index between type 1 of organizations (IP-del and non-IP)	-0.19	-0.2	-0.19	-0.19	Small tendency to connect and coordinate with actors of the same type (UCGM/local organisations V.S. national partners)
E-I index between type 2 of organizations (social, youth, government, etc.)	0.73	0.72	0.72	0.70	Strong inter-category openness. Coordination transcends the different natures of the actors, and bridges exist between different types or levels of action.

Table 6: Top 10% of most central actors in the four networks

	Exchange of informations	Collaboration	Perceived impact of collaboration	Common ideology
Degree centrality (in and out relationship)	TWA, IPDS, ALRD, GASU, JAUP, BACLP	TWA, IPDS, JAUP, GASU, ALRD, Friends, BACLP	TWA, IPDS, GASU, JAUP, BILA, Friends	TWA, IPDS, JAUP, Friends, GASU
Incoming degree centrality	CB, TWA, BAGACHAS, GASU, JAUP, CCU	CB, TWA, BAGACHAS, GASU, JAUP, CCU	CB, TWA, GASU, BAGACHAS, JAUP, CCU	CB, TWA, JAUP, GASU, BAGACHAS
Betweenness centrality	GASU, ForestO, BAKAUP, GMADC, CCU, SEHD	ForestO, GASU, SEHD, GMADC, Lando	LandO, ForestO, BAGACHAS, GMADC, BILA, GRWPCGM	GMADC, GASU, LandO, BAGACHAS, TWA
Marginal actors (incoming relationships)	BPENRM, MPO, RAHA, WFGM	BPENRM, RAHA, MPO, BACLP	BPENRM, RAHA, WFGM, BACLP, ABCB	RAHA, BPENRM, BACLP, MPO, ReRe, LiveO

## **4.2. A common ideological basis for protecting the rights of IPs and their environment, and diverse levels of involvement.**

Analysis of textual data reveals both a common basis of concerns and nuances depending on the type of organization. Deforestation, land grabbing, and biodiversity loss are challenges that are almost unanimously identified regardless of the type/classification of organizations. This convergence on key issues provides a common basis for coordination, even if organizations articulate them differently depending on their areas of action. The variations observed in the discourse reflect a form of complementarity rather than problematic fragmentation. It should nevertheless be noted that some organizations are absent from these data, particularly those operating at the national level, so the observations should be relativized as they reflect only the views of the interviewees.

Some of the UCGM organizations, particularly student, cultural, and social organizations, emphasize the identity aspects and the intrinsic link between the IPs' way of life and the environment ("*Indigenous people's way of life depends on environmental surroundings*" - BAGACHAS; "*Their social, cultural practices, and way of life are connected to land*" - BAKAUP). Government officials emphasise implementation mechanisms (awareness-raising, funding, coordination), although they are not the only ones to refer to the lack of resources, and awareness-raising appears to be a key action for all (see Appendix 4). Rights-based organizations provide the necessary normative framework by emphasizing the recognition of IPs' rights, legal mechanisms, and the dysfunction of policies and government. This diversity suggests a complementarity among organizations' perspectives to understand the project's challenges.

There is consensus on the interdependence between land rights and ecological transition. Almost all organizations recognize that ecological transition cannot be "fair" without securing the rights of indigenous peoples, and that environmental preservation is closely linked to the recognition of their traditional practices. As several organizations put it: "*conservation of ecosystems without securing IPs rights is meaningless*" (BAU), or "*without land rights, preserving indigenous biodiversity is impossible*" (BAJHO). In this sense, some organizations express concerns about their voices not being taken into account in the planning of the ecological transition and about the lack of alternative planning that would integrate the cultures and lifestyles of indigenous societies: "*IPs are unable to participate in environmental planning*" (CBANC), "*ecological transition is one-sided*" (AZIA). This strong ideological convergence, at least among the actors who participated in the interviews, provides a solid foundation for the project and for its integration on a larger scale into the CoRe program, perfectly illustrating at the local level the intertwining of the social and environmental axes of this international program.

With regard to priority actions, while raising awareness does indeed appear to be a guiding principle, the other mentioned priorities, such as capacity building, legal support, financial support, and training, constitute a coherent and complementary set of actions. On the one hand, they reflect the diversity of partners and their approaches, whilst also demonstrating the strong connection to the realities on the ground experienced by local organizations, for whom raising awareness remains a key priority. Some actions may require greater external support, such as technological and financial needs, for which collaboration with organizations that have these resources (such as national or international NGOs) could prove to be an asset. Given the diversity of solutions and actions proposed by project participants, the challenge for the network may be to strategically divide the work by coordinating the specific capacities, resources, and skills of each organization in pursuit of a shared vision. In other words, the variety of proposals reflects the

pragmatic recognition by stakeholders that achieving the project's objectives requires the complementary mobilization of existing forces.

Nevertheless, two points deserve attention. First, although the diagnosis is widely shared, the level of analysis varies: some organizations (SEHD, BAU, IPF) formulate complex systemic analyses—referring in particular to macroeconomic and political dynamics—while others focus on local manifestations of the issues. This asymmetry is not necessarily problematic; it can even facilitate rooting global analyses in local realities and vice versa, but it suggests a potential need for translation and mediation between these different levels of analysis. This need for exchange and mediation between different levels of analysis echoes the structural positions of these actors (within networks): close to the core of indigenous organizations in the case of SEHD, and more or less peripheral to the central node in the case of IPF and BAU. Secondly, although government actors share the general diagnosis, they tend to formulate responses that are more generic and less rooted in the specific rights of IPs. This qualitative observation echoes the peripheral position of the Ministries of Forestry and Agriculture and the Livestock Office in terms of both operational coordination and ideological affinities, perhaps reflecting a stance of withdrawal in the face of issues perceived as potentially too conflictual or too complex. At the same time, the relative proximity of the Land Office and, to a lesser extent, the Forest Office, and their positions as intermediaries, indicate that channels of mediation remain open.

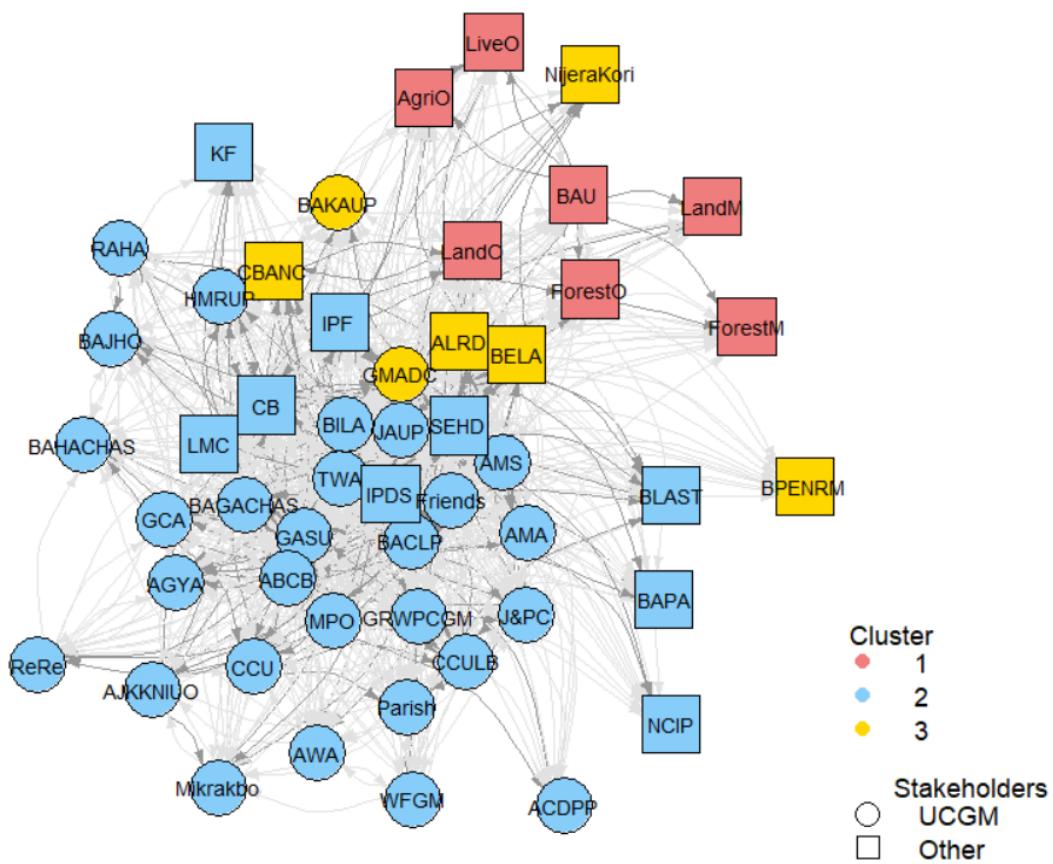
### ***4.3. Between active local community coalitions working on IP rights and the environment, and distant institutional actors***

This section aims to identify possible existing coalitions, i.e., groups of organizations that share a common vision of the project (values, objectives, strategies) and work together to transform their beliefs into public policy (Jenkins-Smith et al., 2014). However, it should be noted that the organizations involved in the ALOC project are, from the outset, characterized as what could be described as an advocacy coalition, with the established objective of influencing public action in favor of indigenous peoples. A large part of the network mobilized within the ALOC-3 project therefore brings together advocacy organizations that are active, albeit on different scales, in promoting and defending the culture, rights, and environment of IPs. We will therefore seek to verify our hypothesis 5—a large expected coalition defending different aspects of IPs' way of life—by identifying, if they exist, groups of actors who share closer connections than with the rest of the network, identifying their conception of the project, and assessing their relative power in the ALOC project implementation process.

First, we look for clusters, which are either tight (meaning they're more connected to each other than to the rest of the network) or structurally similar (meaning they're in similar positions in the network and have similar relationships with other organizations). To do so, we use so-called Block Modelling and Community Detection algorithms designed for this purpose. The results of the network analysis highlight the existence of two relatively stable coalitions: regardless of the network used (collaboration, information, perceived impact, or ideological affinity), their central compositions remain largely unchanged, suggesting the existence of relationally coherent subgroups. However, it should be noted that these groups do not constitute coalitions in the strict sense of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (Jenkins-Smith and al., 2014), as we do not observe any clearly established lines of conflict or divergent objectives between them.

The algorithm<sup>3</sup> identifies three groups within the various networks. UCGM member organizations and non-governmental partners form two relatively stable cohesive structures in terms of information exchanges, collaboration, and their impacts, and they merge to encompass a majority of network stakeholders when it comes to ideological affinities. This group is characterized by a dominant composition of community organizations (social, cultural, student, financial) based in the Greater Mymensingh region, whose areas of intervention are diverse—rights advocacy, cultural preservation, social issues—and links land rights and ecological practices. On the other hand, governmental organizations together with the Bangladesh Agricultural University form a consistent cluster regardless of the relational dimension studied. Thus, institutional actors form a relatively homogeneous subgroup, but their links with the rest of the network are significantly weaker, including the ideological ones.

Figure 5 : Clusters in the ideological affinity network



Finally, given its configuration and the available data, the ALOC network does not allow for the identification of genuine rival coalitions in the strict sense. The UCGM organizations and their committed partners clearly dominate the network in terms of size (at least 85% of stakeholders) and internal relational density, activity, and dynamism, since these organizations carry out most of the project's field and advocacy activities.

Government actors occupy a more peripheral position, but this marginality does not appear to translate into open conflict. On the one hand, organizations criticize the government's inaction or dysfunction, while on the other, the government organizations surveyed broadly acknowledge the issues at stake and share the diagnosis, even if their capacity for action appears limited. This

<sup>3</sup> The Walktrap algorithm was selected by comparing the results of several algorithms and maximizing a performance indicator based on the convergence of results (Deguilhem et al., 2024).

configuration suggests less a rivalry between competing coalitions than an asymmetry in the appropriation and promotion of the project.

The ALOC project appears primarily to be a project promoted by and for indigenous community organizations, with varying levels of commitment from the institutional structures that are supposed to be its partners. This configuration raises less the question of “Which coalition prevails” than that of “How to mobilize the entire network, including its peripheral elements, to strengthen the collective effectiveness of the project”. The main challenge emerging from this analysis would be to translate the apparent consensus into coordinated action and to transform relatively passive institutional actors into truly committed partners.

## 5. Discussion and collective interpretation

### 5.1. Co-interpretation of results by researchers and ALOC staff

The approach adopted for this relational assessment is based on the principle of co-construction of knowledge between researchers and field actors. After presenting the results in the form of exercise books to ALOC staff, their interpretations were collected and put into perspective with the initial analyses. This section compares the two perspectives to identify convergences and questions. The observations of ALOC staff converge with and complement the analyses on several points.

#### ❖ *Periphery and inclusion*

Both parties clearly identify the presence of marginalized actors in the various networks. The staff explicitly acknowledges this observation: “*we can also reach more marginalized groups who are still outside of the active information network*”. These peripheral organizations, such as BPENRM, RAHA, WFGM, MPO, and BACLP, have been highlighted by centrality measures. Furthermore, the staff identifies specific categories that need to be better integrated and that could in turn serve as information relays for their communities: “*We still need more relays in grassroots women's groups, local schools and colleges, and some government field offices*”.

#### ❖ *Asymmetries*

Analysis of E-I indices and clusters reveals a moderate tendency toward segmentation between UCGM member organizations and national partners, as well as limited integration of government actors. The staff expresses this observation in their own words: “*We still need to make stronger connections between UCGM members and other environmental or legal organizations. It is also important to improve connections between community-based organizations and government offices [...] so that we can get full support from them*”. These observations suggest that the fragmentation observed quantitatively constitutes a concrete operational challenge. Another form of asymmetry is highlighted, concerning perceptions of the impact of collaborations, which is interpreted by staff as an issue of visibility and capacity: “*To reduce irregularities, we need to actively highlight the contributions of less visible organizations through joint activities, and involve them in leadership roles during project events*”. This interpretation complements the structural analysis by adding concrete proposals for action for symbolic recognition and the redistribution of power.

#### ❖ *Strategic actors*

Key stakeholders and intermediaries are recognized by staff for their influential role: “*Key stakeholders play an important role in spreading the project's vision and ideas. They lead the*

discussion, point out the main issues, what issues are most important, and bring together groups that may not fully agree". However, the potential risk of dependence on these stakeholders is not explicitly addressed.

Beyond these convergences, certain aspects reveal limitations in the analysis.

#### ❖ *Internal divergences*

Network analysis has shown that clusters, and more broadly ideological relationships, do not exactly overlap with clusters and collaborative relationships. The staff pragmatically sums up this observation as follows: "*Sometimes we share the same vision with some organizations, but we do not work with them directly*". The challenge in the field is thus to "*connect our shared vision with real collaboration*". In addition, while quantitative analysis focuses mainly on differences between types of organizations (UCGM vs. national partners, NGOs vs. government), the staff sheds additional light on internal differences within coalitions, notably mentioning intergenerational differences: "*challenges within the community—like older and younger generations having different ideas or views on how to protect nature—need to be addressed*". This dimension, invisible in the inter-organizational network analysis, reminds us that internal tensions within coalitions can affect their ability to act coherently and effectively.

#### ❖ *Government stakeholders*

The position of these organizations is ambiguous. Network analysis places them on the periphery, which is acknowledged by certain organizations and staff, but the obstacles to "*strengthening connections*" that this implies are not explained. It remains difficult to determine whether the peripheral position of government actors is due to voluntary disengagement, contextual factors in the uncertain political climate, institutional constraints, or fundamental disagreements. It is also difficult to assess whether the absence of ministries, as with the 43% of national actors who did not take part in the survey, reflects an actual disengagement or simply logistical constraints during data collection.

This overview does not resolve all the gray areas, but it helps identify relevant measures to improve project governance, while remaining aware of the limitations of the analysis and the questions that remain unanswered.

### **5.2. Proposals for improving project governance**

The proposals set out here are based on the combination of network analysis, qualitative observations, and suggestions from ALOC staff collected in exercise books. Their implementation will require an assessment of their feasibility and relevance by the stakeholders themselves.

Concerning the integration of peripheral actors, ALOC staff propose to "*make a plan to build better relationships with stakeholders who are less connected. For example, reach out to small groups that are not yet fully involved*". This concrete proposal can be broken down into several dimensions.

A first challenge is to identify priority marginal groups (community organizations, women's organizations, educational organizations, government services) in order to differentiate integration strategies according to the constraints and resources of these different types of stakeholders. For peripheral community organizations, integration could involve their involvement in leadership roles during project events/actions, as suggested by the staff. Visibility is a lever for integration in its own right. For local public institutions, the challenges are different. The limits of their

engagement are probably not due to a lack of recognition but rather to institutional constraints. Improving connections with these actors may require formal invitations as well as a detailed understanding of the obstacles to their effective participation, which remains insufficiently documented in the current analysis.

When it comes to coordinating different levels (local organizations that are members of UCGM and partners operating at the national level), connections that do not form spontaneously require facilitating mechanisms. Several mechanisms were mentioned in the discussion and could be considered. The establishment of collaboration between community organizations and specialized NGOs (legal, environmental) could facilitate coordination between local experience and expertise. Indeed, national NGOs may have analytical, advocacy, and resource mobilization capacities that local organizations do not have, while the latter have detailed knowledge of the realities on the ground and legitimacy within communities. Similarly, organizing thematic workshops bringing together actors operating at different levels and/or specializing in different topics (rights, environment, culture, etc.) could foster the emergence of shared visions and strategies. To sum up, the creation of spaces for dialogue between different levels of analysis can help visions converge.

In general, creating regular spaces for dialogue and joint planning can improve mutual recognition among stakeholders, whether in decision-making, recognizing effective collaborations, supporting dialogue between divergent or complementary visions, or setting shared goals. UCGM could serve as an example or starting point for this type of forum to strengthen collective action. It is up to the project stakeholders to build on this existing structure or to create parallel structures involving representatives of national NGOs and government officials. These spaces can take different forms with varying levels of engagement. For example, a forum for dialogue can operate on the basis of periodic invitations and optional participation, while an instance for operational coordination or a space for co-decision-making requires regular and more formalized participation. These differences must be weighed and discussed in order to avoid incompatible expectations among participants. Furthermore, the inclusion of more distant organizations faces the same difficulties mentioned in the analysis. Simply inviting them to participate is not enough to ensure their active involvement. Certain steps can help overcome these difficulties, such as identifying appropriate interlocutors, clarifying what can be discussed and decided at these meetings, and possibly providing guarantees of confidentiality, particularly in the post-insurgency and politically uncertain context of Bangladesh.

In line with this idea of facilitating dialogue and inclusion, the staff suggested “*Arrange regular feedback meetings to hear what is working well and what needs improvement*”. Indeed, regular feedback mechanisms help to adjust interventions and strategies, but also to highlight the contributions of organizations that are less visible or less heard. These feedback spaces could take different forms, such as face-to-face meetings, remote consultations, questionnaires, or follow-up notebooks. The choice of format will depend on the resources available and the preferences of the stakeholders, but the principle of regularity seems important to ensure that this feedback does not remain informal and occasional.

Based on the various elements we have just discussed, we have compiled a non-exhaustive list of practical suggestions:

- Establish an information dissemination mechanism, facilitated by ALOC staff, to ensure the exchange of news, reports, and feedback between UCGM, like-minded NGOs, and public institutions. Particular attention should be paid to the dissemination methods (language, format–print, digital, oral) to prevent the increased flow of information from creating or exacerbating marginalization.

- Imagine a forum or regular multi-stakeholder dialogue spaces bringing together strategic actors within the UCGM members, partner NGOs and government services.
- Promote collaborations/thematic workshops between community organizations and specialized NGOs (legal, environmental) to facilitate dialogue between the “human rights” and “environmental” visions that structure the network on the subject of the TEJ and to articulate the visions and strategies of organizations working at different scales (local, regional, national, international).
- Encourage the formalization of a common charter on TEJ integrating traditional knowledge, sustainable practices and the rights of indigenous communities and which can serve as a support for advocacy and a guideline.

Finally, it might be useful to repeat a workshop inspired by the one carried out by ALOC staff in February under the supervision of the GEMDEV teams, during which ALOC staff mapped the partner network. These network reconstructions—by staff as well as by other organizations—can serve as a basis for discussion and exchange on the structure of partnerships and their evolution, and on strategies for connecting different organizations. Inspired by the work of Eva Schiffer, this manual network reconstruction does not require the use of complex software and allows participants to visualize their environment. A sheet outlining the procedure, the rules of the game, and the required materials can be found in Appendix 1.

## 6. Conclusion

In a context marked by the precariousness of land rights for indigenous populations in Bangladesh and the degradation of their environment, the ALOC project deploys an advocacy strategy that focuses on strengthening local capacities. But it does not abandon the need to influence public policies protecting these communities. The relational assessment conducted by ARPOP-GEMDEV aimed to analyze the governance of this complex network, mobilizing 51 organizations, whose heterogeneity constitutes both a strength (complementarity of expertise and scales of intervention) and a challenge (asymmetries of recognition, involvement, and influence).

The analysis reveals a cohesive core of Indigenous organizations sharing a strong ideological convergence on the interdependence between land rights and environmental preservation. This common ground, confirmed by qualitative data, constitutes a solid foundation for the project's sustainability. However, translating this consensus into coordinated action faces several structural obstacles: limited commitment from government actors despite their decisive institutional power, difficulties to reach representatives of national partners, moderate segmentation between local and national levels, and a disconnect between central actors in operational coordination and those perceived as influential. The main challenge identified, therefore, lies not in aligning visions but in the capacity to mobilize the entire network, including its peripheral elements, and to transform relatively passive institutional actors into genuinely engaged partners—a challenge complicated by the uncertain political context.

Beyond its relevance to ALOC, this experience illustrates the challenges of the CoRe program on an international scale. The Bangladeshi case confirms that the ecological transition cannot be “just” without the effective inclusion of marginalized communities in decision-making processes, the recognition of their traditional knowledge, and the safeguarding of their rights. It also highlights the tension between local dynamism and institutional influence: Indigenous organizations carry out the bulk of the work on the ground but struggle to directly influence public policy, while government actors hold institutional power but are not perceived as effective supporters. The

challenge for the CoRe program, in its 18 countries of operation, is therefore to continue supporting local networks and creating the political conditions that enable these populations to participate in ecological transition pathways.

The relational assessment module aims to highlight invisible dynamics (asymmetries, bridges, cohesion, and barriers) and to transform assessment into a collective learning process. Methodological limitations (subjective perceptions, non-response rates, the invisibility of certain informal, internal organizational, or interpersonal dynamics) require cautious interpretations. However, experience shows that such an approach can be adapted locally and contribute to the development of more resilient, transparent, and inclusive governance strategies so that the ecological transition leaves no one behind.

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# Appendix

## Appendix 1. “Net-Map” Workshop – Network Mapping

This document presents the participatory workshop held in February with ALOC-3 staff, inspired by the work of Eva Schiffer (2008). It serves as a roadmap for replicating the workshop.

### 1. Workshop Objectives

The participatory workshop can be conducted as individual interviews or group sessions, depending on needs (data collection vs. building a shared vision). It aims to:

- Identify the stakeholders (whether organizations or individuals) involved in a project.
- Visualize the relationships/connections between actors (information flow, collaboration, trust, financing, agreements/disagreements, links to be established in the future, etc.).
- Measure the perceived power or influence of stakeholders on project objectives.
- Promote a collective understanding of the network and identify levers for action.

### 2. Materials

- At least one large sheet of paper (minimum A2) to draw the network map.
- Post-it notes to write down the names of organizations. Use several colors to differentiate between types of organizations (e.g local organizations, national partners, government) or to differentiate between their advocacy and action themes (environmental, rights, cultural, etc.).
- Flat, stackable discs to build “towers of influence” (a sufficient number).
- Markers in different colors to draw the links between actors (1 color = 1 type of relationship).
- Notebook to document the exercise.

### 3. Implementation steps

#### 1/ Implementation

To begin with, decide what question the workshop seeks to clarify. For example: “Who can influence the achievement of the objectives of project X?” or “Who is involved in strategic decisions concerning Y?” Are we focusing on individuals or organizations? If the workshop includes a sufficient number of participants, form 2 or 3 balanced subgroups (mixed hierarchy, experience, gender) that carry out the exercise independently to compare the results.

#### 2/ Identifying stakeholders (15-20 min)

Place the large sheet of paper in front of the participants and ask them to list all the stakeholders (individuals or organizations, depending on what was decided during preparation) involved in the subject area. These may be local, regional, national, or international stakeholders, both formal and informal. The names are written on Post-it notes and placed on the sheet in such a way as to anticipate links (actors that are closely connected to each other).

#### 3/ Define and trace connections (25-30 min)

Start by creating a legend in one corner of the sheet (1 color = 1 type of link). Then participants draw arrows between actors (with the option of representing directions as shown in figure XXX or not). It is more strategic to start by representing rare links and finish with the most frequent ones. If it is decided to represent several types of links on the same sheet, to avoid overloading it, it is possible to add arrowheads of different colors to the same arrow. The organizer guides participants

through this step, ensuring that they complete one color before moving on to the next and that they accurately represent the current situation.

#### **4/ Building towers of influence (20-25 min)**

Start by defining influence with the participants: is it an actor's ability to achieve their goals in this specific area? Is it a formal hierarchy? Is it influence that comes from specific attributes such as decision-making power, advice, incentives, etc.? During this step, participants will place tokens on the Post-it notes; the more influence an actor has, the taller their tower.

During this stage, participants are asked to comment on the height of the towers of tokens, starting with the tallest, and the group validates or adjusts them. In the notebook, organizers note the name and height of each tower and note the participants' comments.

#### **5/ Discussion (30-40 min)**

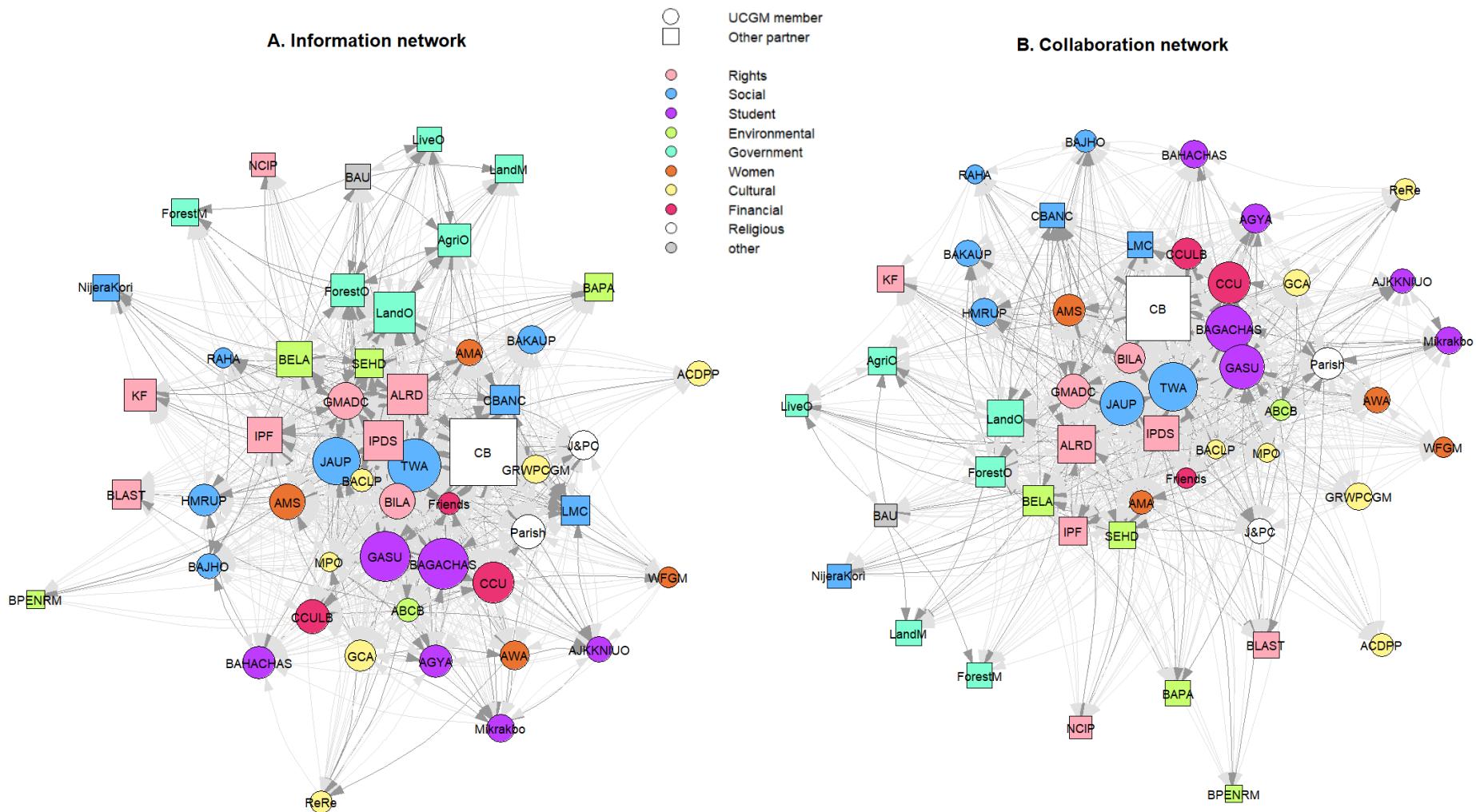
Finally, based on the map, a time for exchange and discussion is organized. During this time, it is important to talk about all the stakeholders, both the most influential and the marginal ones. Here are some example questions:

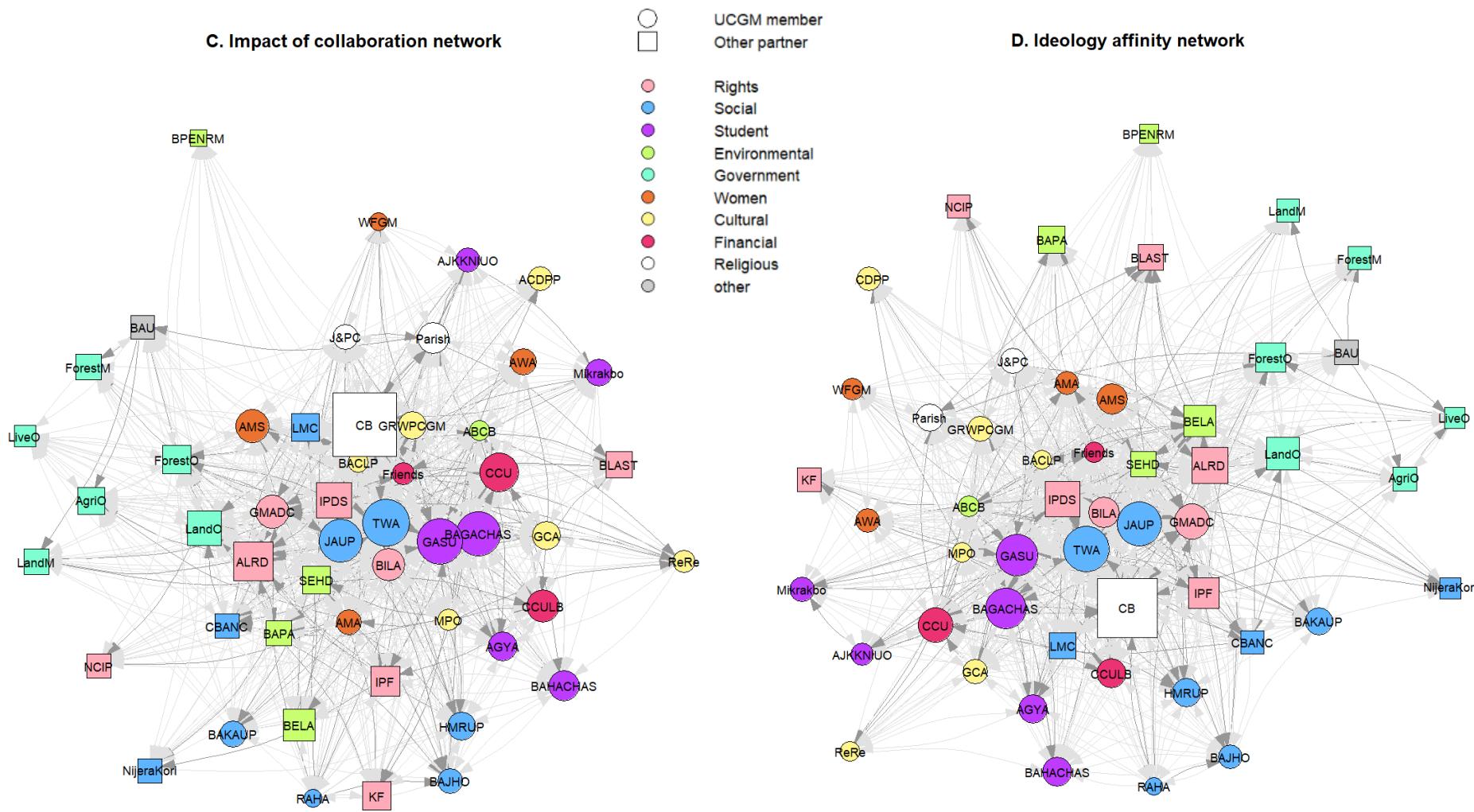
- “Why is this stakeholder the highest tower? Where does their influence come from?”
- “This stakeholder is linked to many others but has little influence. Why?”
- “I have heard about a conflict concerning X between these stakeholders. Can you explain?”
- “Are there any stakeholders missing from this map?”
- “This stakeholder is influential but has few connections. Why, and how can connections be created?”
- “What links would you like to establish or strengthen to achieve your goals?”
- “Which stakeholders would you like to add to the network?”
- “What alliances could you form and why?”
- Future links can be drawn in a different color.

Repeating the exercise after a certain period of time (e.g., one year) helps to measure the evolution of influence and connections and to compare the initial strategy with the actual reality in order to adjust strategies if necessary. To this end, the exercise must be documented (photos of the maps, notes on influence, comments, discussions, and strategies).

## ***Appendix 2. Networks in-degree centrality***

In-degree only takes into account instances where organizations are mentioned as partners by other organizations

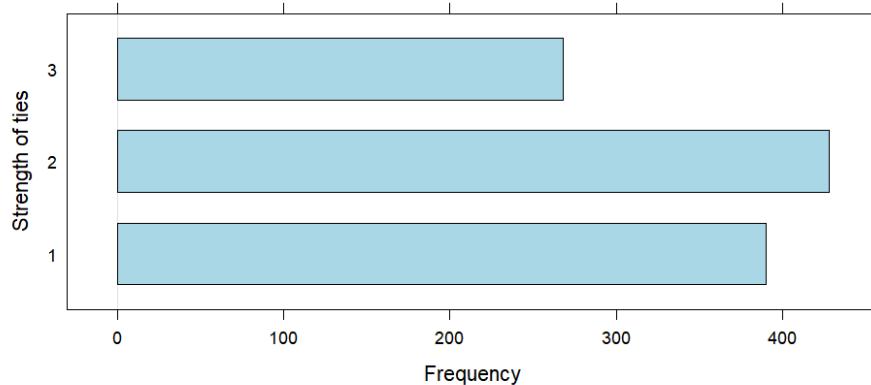




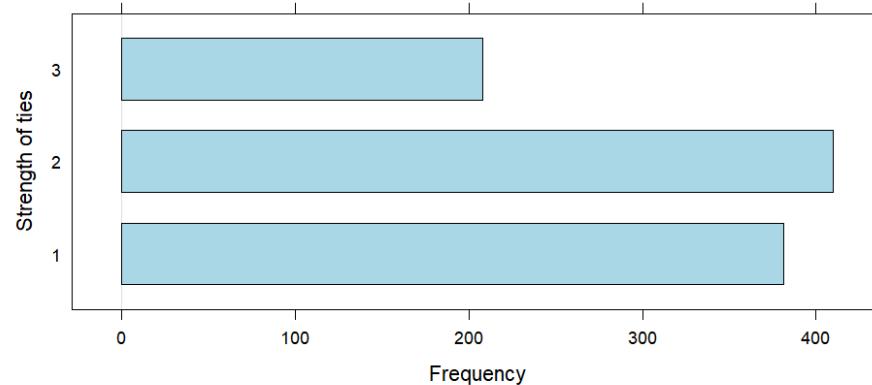
Note: the strongest links (strength 3) are shown in dark gray, while weaker or moderate links (strength 1 and 2) are shown in light gray. It can be seen that a significant proportion of relationships are perceived as moderately strong. The distribution of link strength in the networks can be found in Appendix 3 p. 41.

### Appendix 3. Relationship strength distribution in the networks

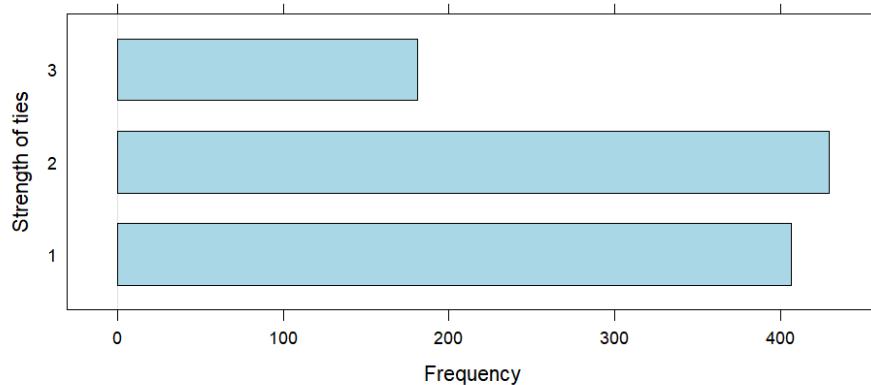
**A. Information relationships**



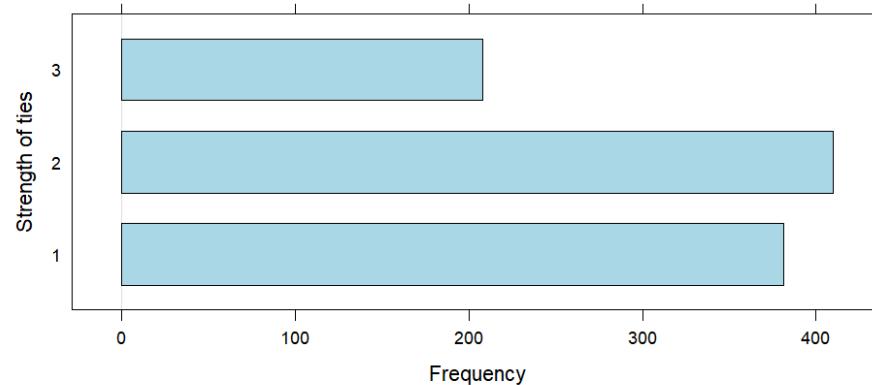
**B. Collaboration relationships**



**C. Impact of collaboration relationships**



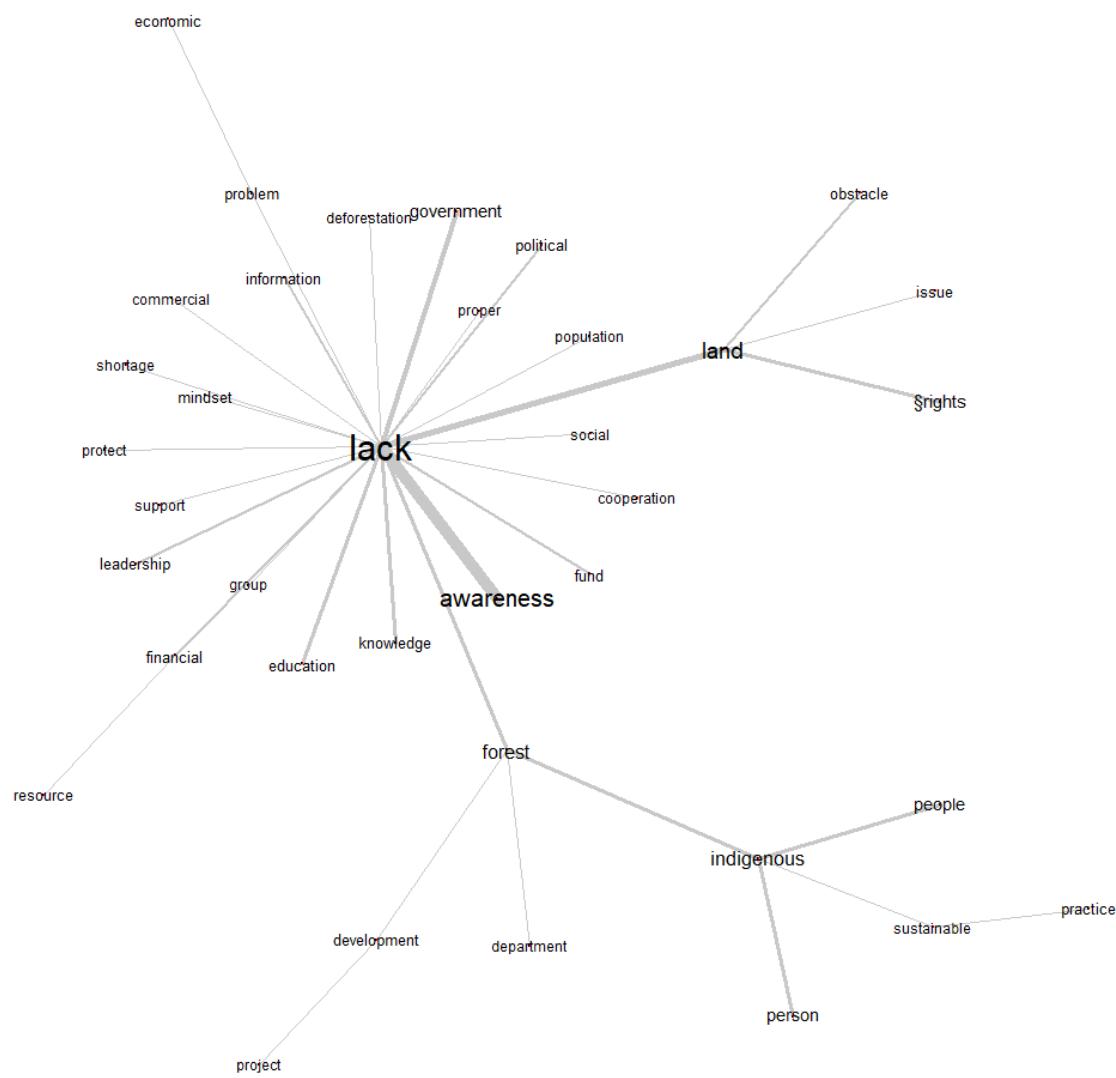
**D. Ideology affinity relationships**



## Appendix 4. Semantic networks<sup>4</sup>

### A. Major obstacles

The exact wording of the question was “What do you see as the major obstacles to implementing sustainable ecological practices in IP communities?”



*Note : The figure represents a word network. When words are used together by the interviewee to answer the question, a link is created between them. The thickness of the link corresponds to the number of times two words are used together by different interviewees (the thicker the link, the more often the words were used simultaneously). The thickness of the word is related to the number of occurrences of the word alone (the thicker the word, the more often it was used in the responses).*

<sup>4</sup> The graphs were modeled using Iramuteq software, which allows statistical analyses to be performed on text corpus.

## B. Actions to support the fair ecological transition within IP communities

The exact wording of the question was “What types of actions or additional support would be needed to strengthen the ecological transition in IP communities?”



*Note : The figure represents a word network. When words are used together by the interviewee to answer the question, a link is created between them. The thickness of the link corresponds to the number of times two words are used together by different interviewees (the thicker the link, the more often the words were used simultaneously). The thickness of the word is related to the number of occurrences of the word alone (the thicker the word, the more often it was used in the responses).*