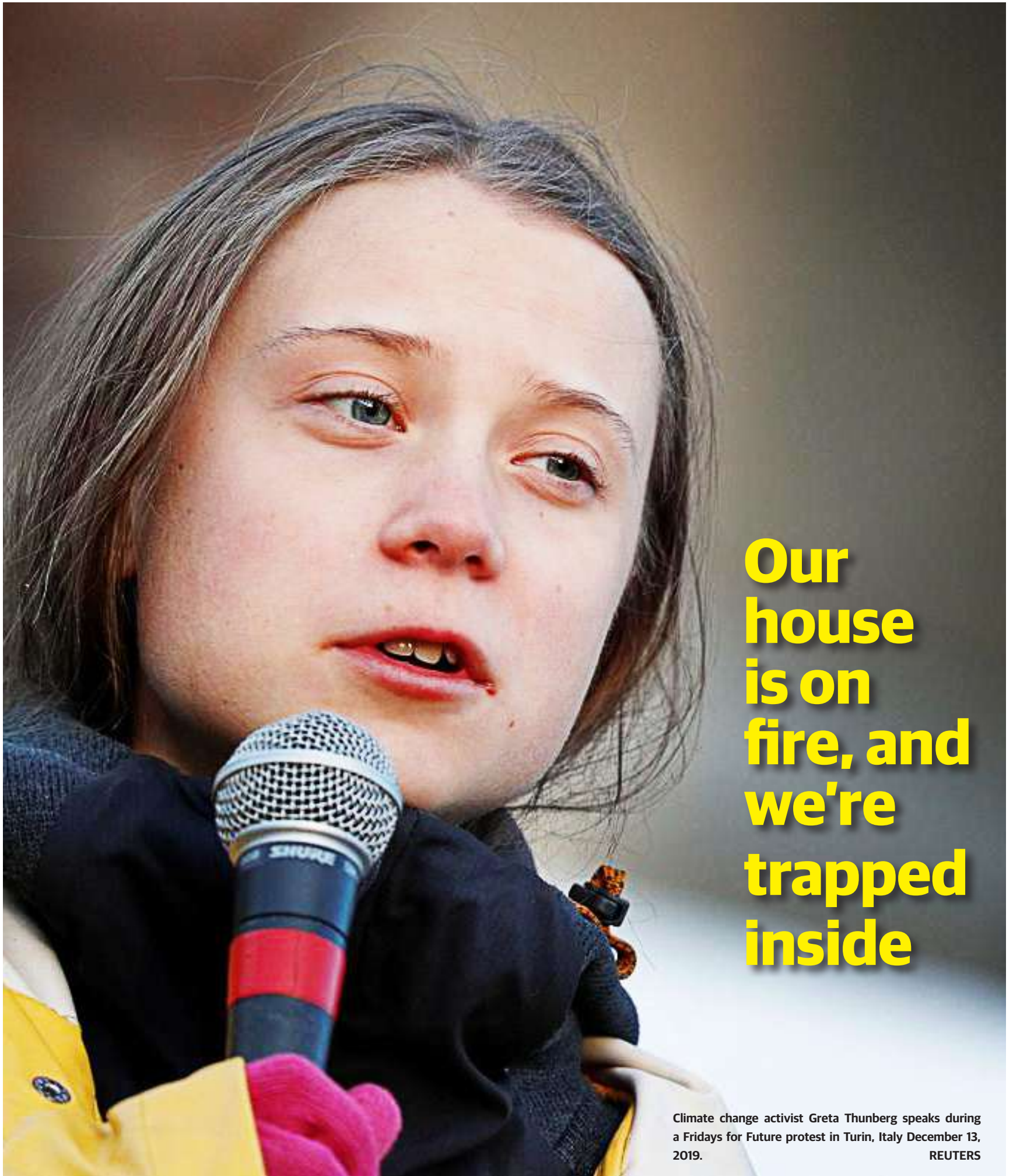


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Climate Tribune



Our house is on fire, and we're trapped inside

Climate change activist Greta Thunberg speaks during a Fridays for Future protest in Turin, Italy December 13, 2019. REUTERS

Young activists through social media presence have helped ensure that climate action is not forgotten in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and helped to foster connections across geographic divides

Rachel Nel

Young climate and environmental activists have succeeded in capturing the world's attention. Youth climate action initiatives have played an instrumental role in creating the sense of urgency that many feel today, as illustrated by Greta Thunberg's speech 'Our house is on fire'.

They have claimed a position of strong moral authority, demanding that political leaders respect their right to a safe and secure future. Their moral authority and collaboration with one another across political and geographical

Bangladesh is ranked seventh on the Long Term Climate Risk Index (2020). The increase of climate related extreme weather events risk lives in the present and denies young people their right to a liveable future. Sabnam wants to use the current momentum of the climate movement to bring Bangladeshi women, children and Rohingya refugees into the forefront of climate discussions. By speaking up and demanding climate action, young people have shown themselves to be capable of providing leadership to a crisis that many adults are reluctant to accept.

The success of youth climate movements in mobilising peers and garnering international attention has inspired young people to take action within their communities. Fifteen-year-old Leah Namugerwa advocates for climate justice in Uganda, leading student climate strikes and taking part in the Fridays for Future movement.

For Uganda, the increased risk of drought associated with climate change makes growing crops increasingly difficult and puts many livelihoods at risk. Namugerwa hopes for change in Uganda, and started the campaign #BanPlasticUG, calling for Uganda to ban plastic bags like its East African counterparts.

Single usage, light plastic bags are in very common use in Uganda. Without sufficient infrastructure to dispose of these, they litter towns and farmlands and clog waterways. Many cattle and birds also die from ingesting these stray plastic bags. Plastic pickups organised by Namugerwa and her supporters targeted these areas. This campaign is ongoing, but with lockdown measures, it has mostly been moved to online advocacy and petitions. Namugerwa's experience in environmental activism and substantial support base gave her the confidence to tackle a new crisis threatening Ugandans: the Covid-19 pandemic.

After lockdown measures were imposed in Uganda, Namugerwa started a fund to provide meals to starving children. "As much as children have had less direct effects, they are still severely affected indirectly," she said in a video on Twitter. Namugerwa's fund specifically targets children already disadvantaged by the effects of climate change, who now have to cope with further socio-economic problems associated with the Covid-19 pandemic.

As of early July, the fund has supplied approximately 1,000 meals to vulnerable children with Namugerwa eager to supply another 1,000 more. Namugerwa and other youth activists' active presence on social media platforms allowed their initiatives to flourish, and made for an easy transition to online advocacy with lockdown measures in place.

Young peoples' familiarity with social media platforms has allowed climate action groups to stay connected and continue climate protests online. Fridays for Future protests have continued, where participants strike at home and post a picture of themselves (and their placard) to social media.

Though some of the energy and enthusiasm may have been lost with the large climate protests cancelled this year, many young people still have optimism. Their social media presence has helped ensure that climate action is not forgotten in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic and helped to foster connections across geographic divides. Furthermore, the pandemic proved that institutional change can happen quickly. The Covid-19 'crisis' presents an opportunity for governments and institutions to change for the better.

Today's youth movements have shown themselves to be organized and efficient and capable of directly confronting crises. Despite this, their strength and resilience is oftentimes overlooked in decision making processes that will affect their futures. This highlights the importance of platforms that give young people a voice and harness their passion and enthusiasm.

The strength and influence of the youth climate and environmental movement is game-changing for the future of the planet. Young peoples' moral authority forces political leaders to confront the fundamental right of intergenerational equity and forces them to think of the long implications of their decisions on future generations. The fact that the majority of political leaders and their supporters are parents makes young peoples' call for action message both personal and inescapable. ●

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Fifteen-year-old Leah Namugerwa advocates for climate justice in Uganda, leading student climate strikes and taking part in the Fridays for Future movement

divides has caused the youth climate movement to become particularly strong and influential and has inspired young people across the world to speak up, take initiative and secure their future.

Young people are often thought of as 'the future', but youth activists stress that this is a crisis that needs to be addressed in the present. For 16-year-old Bangladeshi-American activist Rebecca Sabnam, the experiences of climate change were first hand. In front of a crowd of more than 200 thousand at a climate protest in New York last December, she recounted how her uncle had to carry her to school on his back during flooding in her home city of Dhaka. Her speech went on to highlight how the effects of climate change are felt most strongly by vulnerable groups like women and migrants, exacerbating existing inequalities.

After nearly three decades of climate talks the future remains uncertain

While the Paris Agreement is a great achievement in international diplomacy its direct impact on climate change is another matter

Danielle Falzon

The 26th Conference of the Parties (COP) meeting for the UN climate negotiations was planned to take place in Glasgow, UK in November. Like many other large events, the negotiations were postponed due to Covid precautions. Now that the mid-year meeting to prepare for COP 26 has also been delayed to 2021, it is unclear when the world will again convene to tackle the problem of climate change.

Some might say this is worrisome because we don't want to lose momentum. Since the 2015 Paris Agreement, each year of negotiations has been a slow but steady process of building on the agreement and preparing for its implementation. However, I want to suggest that the delay is also worrisome because the thread of global action on climate change is thin, and straining what little has been built through the negotiations over the years might cause it to snap.



PHOTOS: PIXABAY



The main goal of the first COP meetings was to create a treaty with clear goals and timelines for reducing GHG emissions

So how did we get here?

The international community began conversations on climate change in the early 1990s. The UN established the Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee for a Framework Convention on Climate Change (the INC) to develop a plan for climate change that would be presented at the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. After several meetings beginning in 1991, they developed the text that would become the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

At the time, the climate debate centered mainly on the issue of mitigation, or the reduction of greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions to prevent climate change from happening (or now, worsening). Developing countries mainly saw this as a problem for the wealthy industrialized nations to solve - after all, they had caused the problem. Nonetheless, by 1994 the Convention had entered into force with over 150 countries signed on as Parties, and the COP meetings began the following year.

There were a few key elements to

the Convention that made it amenable to a broad range of Parties. Developing countries were promised funds that were "new and additional" to development and humanitarian aid flows. The different roles of countries in addressing climate change was captured through the phrase "common but differentiated responsibilities and respective capabilities." And while sustainable development was emphasized for developing countries, the Convention did not set timelines and goals for emissions cuts, mostly to appease the United States.

The main goal of the first COP meetings was to create a treaty with clear goals and timelines for reducing GHG emissions. These efforts resulted in the Kyoto Protocol in 1997. The Protocol required developed countries (designated as "Annex I Parties") to reduce their emissions by at least 5% below 1990 levels before 2012. Unfortunately, the United States and other large emitters decided not to ratify the Protocol, and so there were significantly lower emissions reductions than expected. Also,

countries like China and India were considered "non-Annex I Parties" without emissions reduction requirements, and are now two of the world's biggest GHG emitters.

In the early 2000s, developing countries brought another issue to the negotiating table: adaptation. Adaptation refers to actions that aim to reduce the impacts of climate change on communities. In 2007, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) released its fourth assessment report, finding that developing countries were likely to experience the worst effects of climate change and would need urgent adaptation action. Adaptation then became a second pillar in the negotiations alongside mitigation.

In the Bali Action Plan that same year, negotiators agreed to start planning the successor to the Kyoto Protocol, to be finalized at COP 15 in Copenhagen in 2009. Instead of producing a new climate treaty, Copenhagen ended in an embarrassing failure. A leaked draft treaty written by a few developed

countries created an atmosphere of distrust, and there was little agreement on how to move forward. On the last night, leaders from the US, China, India, Brazil, and South Africa locked themselves in a room to write the Copenhagen Accord. The next day, unhappy countries were forced to sign the Accord, which contained little more than a pledge to mobilize US\$100 billion in climate finance.

Many began to lose hope that the climate negotiations would ever be able to produce an effective climate treaty

However, the COPs continued along with some important developments. In 2013, the small island states and LDCs had an important win at the meeting in Warsaw. At that meeting, delegates negotiated the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage. Loss and damage refers to the effects of climate change impacts that could not be avoided through mitigation and adaptation efforts. It can be economic, such as property loss, or non-economic, such as damage to mental or physical health. For countries that are projected to experience the worst effects of climate

change, loss and damage calls attention to their vulnerabilities.

By 2015, countries were again prepared to buckle down and come up with the next climate treaty. The stakes were high, and it's likely that if these negotiations were unsuccessful they may have ended permanently. After much work and compromise, the Paris Agreement was signed at the end of COP 21. It contained a Global Goal for Mitigation (keeping global average temperature rise to 2 degrees Celsius, with an enhanced goal of 1.5 degrees), an unspecified Global Goal for Adaptation, and Article 8 on Loss and Damage. It also tackled issues of finance, capacity building, transparency, and many more.

While the Paris Agreement is a great achievement in international diplomacy its direct impact on climate change is another matter. It does not require any emissions reductions, nor any adaptation action, and countries are not obligated to provide climate finance. Instead, countries make pledges for what they want to achieve in Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs). Countries only must report on their progress at designated intervals, and

enforcement consists of "naming and shaming" those that have not fulfilled their pledges.

I am glad we have the Paris Agreement, but I am skeptical that it is a guaranteed pathway to success. Not only has the US moved to withdraw from the treaty, participating countries can still set and work toward their goals as is convenient for them. While this structure removed the differentiation between developed and developing countries that plagued earlier plans, it also allows for inaction.

And so we return to 2020. What makes the Paris Agreement work is that countries are supposed to regularly submit increasingly ambitious NDCs. This "ratcheting up" is meant to be a central feature of the negotiations over the next several years. Jamaica, setting a laudable example, has already submitted their new NDC. But it is unclear whether other countries will be compelled to do the same without the deadlines and fanfare of the COP.

As the international negotiations are delayed, climate change risks slipping down countries' lists of priorities. In the past, the COP has served as a focusing

moment, at which new plans and pledges are announced and celebrated publicly. It is not only the progress in the negotiations but the progress around the negotiations that enhances climate action.

I have my critiques of much of the climate action that is taking place around the world. There is not nearly enough of it and I argue that much of what is happening is ineffective. However, the UN negotiations have been a critical constant, pushing climate change discussions forward in the international arena for nearly three decades.

The delay in COP 26 due to Covid makes clear that we need to find new and more stable structures to ensure that global disasters do not destabilize the foundations for progress that have already been laid. Parties to the UNFCCC should know best that there are likely even more disasters on the horizon. ●

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Global call for higher capacity building actions under the Paris Agreement

Capacity-building mechanism of PCCB to tackle climate change



PIXABAY

Farah Anzum and Mahmuda Mity

In striving to reach the global goal of below 2 degree Celsius of warming, and to promote a strenuous task of attempting to stay below 1.5 degree Celsius of warming, countries adopted the Paris Agreement (PA) in 2015.

The Paris Agreement's capacity building (CB) provisions included establishing a Paris Committee on Capacity Building (PCCB) (Article 11); a Capacity Building Initiative for Transparency (CBIT) (Article 13); and to promote education, training and public awareness (Article 12).

All of which form the basis for all institutions, mechanisms and processes to work towards enhancing CB of stakeholders, ranging from both national to

local level (Khan et al, 2016). June 2020 has been an important month for the CB arena, as two of the vital events under the UN Convention and Paris Agreement took place; 9th Durban Forum (DF) and 4th meeting of the PCCB. This article will explore some of the major decisions from these events.

Firstly, the Durban Forum on Capacity-building is an annual, in-session event organized under the Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) of the UNFCCC which brings together diverse stakeholders involved in CB activities for developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change (UNFCCC, 2020). In the line of these annual series, this year the 9th Durban Forum was held on June 9, aimed at supporting the implementation of Enhanced Transpar-

ency Framework (ETF) under the PA and ensuring coherence and coordination of actions and support.

Implementing a smoother transition from the previous Measurement, Reporting and Verification (MRV) system to ETF requires a higher transparency and CB of actors, and the Durban Forum (DF) has notably emphasized the need for stronger linkages among parties to assist developing countries into using this transitional mechanism.

Studies by Consultative Group of Experts (CGE), show that more than 50% of the parties have limited knowledge and understanding regarding the new ETF process, even though fundamentally MRVs and ETFs are not entirely different. Hence, the DF suggested to build the domestic system of the parties by in-

tegrating relevant stakeholders and use learning from the previous MRVs to sustain the implementation in the long run.

Often, LDCS and SIDs have higher usage and arguably dependency on overseas expertise/consultants due to the lack of compatibility which pushes them away from the smooth transition. It valiantly outlines the need for effective institutional arrangements where universities can play a bigger role in enhancing CB of the future leaders.

To support these initiatives, South-South cooperation should also be emphasized as it can offer several benefits through knowledge sharing and cooperation among countries to identify the most cost-effective practices.

However, the substantial discussion of the DF highlighted that MRVs should be the starting point for ETF transition and support mechanisms need to be designed effectively for the CB of developing nations. There is a higher need to avoid bureaucratic issues at the policy level and focus should be given to develop tailored CB tools as per the need of the stakeholders.



June 2020 has been an important month for the CB arena, as two of the vital events under the UN Convention and Paris Agreement took place

Data quality, storage and management should be prioritized as well in terms of accessibility and transparency. Moreover, the Paris Committee on Capacity-building (PCCB) has a big role in this process as it works towards enhancing coherence and coordination on CB in different countries as they have deeper insights regarding the capacity gaps and needs of the parties.

The second event was the 4th PCCB meeting on Capacity-building, held from June 22-25. It is another annual, in-session event organized by the SBI, aiming to discuss its annual activities, to further develop and adopt its working modalities and procedures.

The aim of the four day event was to elect two co-chairs from its members and to highlight the development of the work plan for 2021-2024, discussion on the technical support and guidance on building climate-related capacity, ensuring coherence and coordination of CB under the Convention, enhancing awareness-raising, outreach, knowledge and information sharing, and a discussion about the focus area of the PCCB for 2021. The meeting was opened to attendance by parties and admitted observer organizations, except where otherwise decided by the PCCB where a balanced regional representation of observers was encouraged to join.

During this meeting, the PCCB members shared the outcome of the 9th Durban Forum and 3rd Capacity Building

Hub, and welcomed the PCCB Network working group. The PCCB members agreed on the development of PCCB work-plan for 2021-2024 and to provide technical support for the CB activities, keeping the consideration of COP26 in mind.

They also agreed to maintain coherence and coordination of CB under the Convention, finalized the concept note and showed interest for further follow-up to incorporate into the Annual Technical Progress Report (ATPR) 2020. The PCCB members highlighted the different issues of reviewing the implementation of the strategic plan for stakeholder engagement, communication and resource mobilization.

Considering the extension of the mandate of the PCCB and subsequent adaptation of a new work-plan, PCCB members were invited to publish the annexed review report on the implementation of the PCCB webpage, and to continue monitoring and report on the implementation of the strategic plan for June 2020- June 2021.

They were also invited to develop separate strategies for stakeholder engagement and communication for the work-plan 2021-2024. The pilot phase of PCCB Network has also been discussed to extend further.

PCCB members also supported the notion of postponing the Capacity Building Hub and hosted by COP26 and not otherwise, as it widens the oppor-



Currently, most universities, research organizations, and climate practitioners in developing countries are working towards reducing their knowledge gaps on CB as it is now one of the pressing issues in the climate change world

tunity to involve multiple stakeholders from different regions and learn their experience. The meeting ended with an invitation to be optimistic for the future CB activities and invited higher engagement of its members.

However, currently most universities, research organizations, and climate practitioners in developing countries are working towards reducing their knowledge gaps on CB, as it is now one of the pressing issues in the climate change world.

They are also proactively participating in several events on building climate-related capacity including Durban Forum and PCCB meeting. This spontaneous engagement and notions to respond to the global CB arena will

definitely heighten the capacities of the parties to respond to the threats of climate change. ●

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Framework Convention on
Climate Change

PCCB/2020/1

Paris Committee on Capacity-building

20 May 2020

Fourth meeting
Virtual meeting, 22–25 June 2020

I. Provisional agenda

1. *Opening of the meeting.*
2. *Organizational matters:*
 - (a) *Adoption of the agenda;*
 - (b) *Organization of work*

ILLUSTRATION: SAQIB SARKER

Bangladesh trapped in a bad marriage with eucalyptus trees

An exotic plant introduced here in the 30s has been drying up the soil and causing environmental hazard

Adiba Bintey Kamal

The idea that trees can help limit global warming is enshrined in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, with most countries including forest expansion as part of their plans to reduce emissions. It is universally agreed upon that planting trees is the least expensive and perhaps the easiest way to offset carbon.

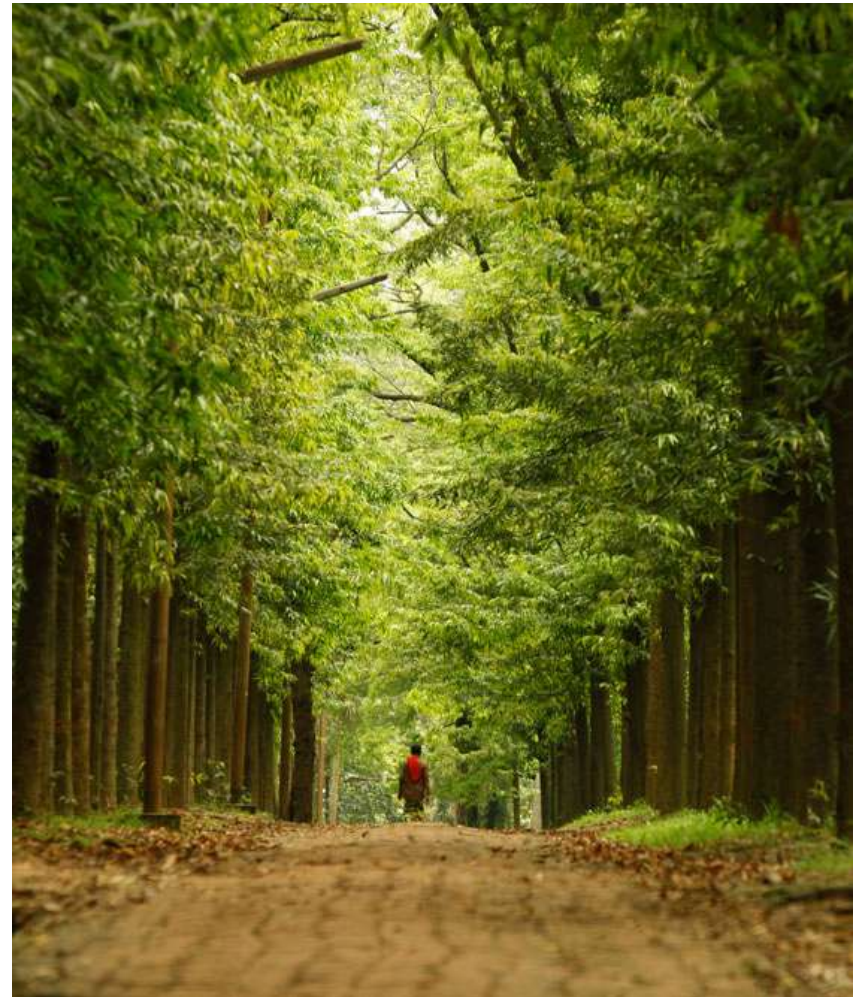
Tree planting is an instrumental action to save the Earth which is without any doubt a cost-effective Nature Based solution to tackle issues like climate change. This year the forest of Sundarban once again saved us from the impact of Cyclone Amphan, 2020 just like last year's Cyclone Bulbul and it has been doing so for many years. Also, people in all communities already have the skill, capacity, and resources to do tree plantation.

However, people take this opportunity and plant many exotic trees intentionally or unintentionally such as eucalyptuses by clearing the forest to meet the needs of the industries across the

country. One of the biggest problems with eucalyptus is the negative impact on the environment because its rate of transpiration is awfully high. Eucalyptus has more economic value however, the same traits that make eucalyptus attractive for planting such as rapid growth compared to other trees, also make them potentially invasive.

The eucalyptus tree originated from Australia and was introduced to our country in the 30s. If we look back into history, in 1930 this tree was haphazardly introduced in eastern Bangladesh by the tea estates as an ornamental tree (Davidson and Das, 1985). Back in 1995, when the bad effects of eucalyptus were detected by the Ministry of Environment and Forest department (MoEF) they excluded eucalyptus from its afforestation program and informed the people about its effects on the environment (The Financial Express, 2018).

Sadly, it was too late because the plantation practice of eucalyptus was out of control as nurseries around the country produced and sold the saplings in huge quantities. This exotic plant



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

provides more money because of the timber and as it grows in a very short time compared to other trees. In some cases, most of the people are aware of the adverse effects of the tree, but they grow and sell it for the sake of better business.

Presently, eucalyptus plantations are so widespread that they can easily be found in large numbers on almost every yard, premises of offices, by the roadsides and along railway tracks especially in the Northern parts of Bangladesh (Dinajpur, Thakurgaon, Panchagarh, Rangpur, Nilphamari, Gaibandha, Kurigram and Bogra), putting the environment in grave danger (Khan, 2018).

Eucalyptus contributes to drying through transpiring water 18-20 times more than any other tree in the country. If eucalyptuses are allowed to grow around a natural reservoir for about 10 years at a number of 10 percent of total trees, water level is likely to reduce by 20 percent (Rahman, 2016).

Even the leaves of this tree cannot be easily decomposed and cause harm to the soil. Experts say that pollen emission from the eucalyptus flowers is also high, which may cause respiratory problems to humans.

Growing eucalyptuses in low rainfall areas (Northern Part of Bangladesh) may cause adverse environmental im-

pacts due to competition for water with other species and an increased incidence of allelopathy.

When Eucalyptus is grown as a short rotation crop for high biomass production and removal, soil nutrients are depleted rapidly. Almost no other vegetation is found under eucalyptus trees and less birds are found nesting in eucalyptus plots.

Getting rid of eucalyptus trees is also difficult because remaining strum can sprout a new eucalyptus tree, if not uprooted fully. In this case the question arises - "what types of trees are environment friendly?" Planting trees should be conducted by first understanding the environmental circumstances and an individual should plant trees that are fruit-bearing and that produce quality timber simultaneously.

Despite all the negative impacts of eucalyptus, people are still planting it for financial gain. As our ground water level is decreasing, we need to have a strong and adequate plan, fund and policy which will address issues like this type of exotic plantation. Without effective policy implementation this type of initiative will go into vain. We need to remember one thing that is - "Less vegetation leads Human Settlements into more Vulnerability" (Chowdhury, 2020). ●



This exotic plant provides more money because of the timber and as it grows in a very short time compared to other trees

Covid-19 and the digital divide

Attending virtual climate talks, a luxury or right? Globally, 3.6 billion people remain offline today, with the majority of them in underdeveloped countries.

Shahrin Mannan

With the closure of international borders and the ongoing lockdown, the Covid-19 pandemic has forced us to stay indoors and embrace remote working arrangements using various virtual video conferencing tools.

Worldwide, people now rely more on Information and Communications Technologies (ICTs) to adapt to the evolving uncertainty and operate with minimal disruption. The new digital society provides an efficient medium for communication while maintaining social distance, but it has made digital divide more pronounced than ever amid the global lockdown.

Experts are concerned that in the current circumstances, where over 46 percent of the world population remains without technology or internet access, this digital divide could grow wider. Globally, 3.6 billion people remain offline today, with the majority of them in underdeveloped countries. The situation is much worse in Least Developed Countries (LDC's) where access to the internet is very challenging.

Given the impediments posed by the pandemic and online access being the main way to stay connected, the question remains which communities have the tools to survive this pandemic. Covid-19 is further amplifying the already existing disparities in digital learning, and distance education in the poorer countries and impoverished households.

This unprecedented crisis poses an immediate threat to inclusiveness and in turn widening the inequality gap further. Despite having an impressive lead in bridging the digital divide, the precarious access to ICTs by grassroots communities and organizations in different parts of the world still remains a challenge.

Not only the virtual platforms are giving us a social gateway, these have also been recruited to disseminate accurate information related to the pandemic. As a result, those having no/poor access to digital technologies largely fall behind in the race to access accurate information. This is critical especially in light of the many misinformation and fake news about Covid-19.



PIXABAY



This could also hamper international cooperation and trust especially among LDCs which are fostered through face-to-face diplomacy

Differential access to ICTs across many dimensions including gender, age and socio-economic position continues to hinder meaningful participation in the digital world. As many grassroots communities still don't have access to electricity, having high speed internet connections to attend talks, webinars or even classes have become a mere luxury for those people.

The issues of connectivity, time zones, technical limitations and difficulties in interacting online further perpetuate the challenges. This striking contradiction is only building on pre-existing inequalities among communities on the matters of income, access to services, utilities, living and working conditions, access to social protection and quality education.

Climate action and digital divide

The digital divide also has an impact on the ability of developing countries in dealing with the impact of climate change. Bangladesh is well-known to be an adaptation champion and having been doing exceedingly well in sharing

experiential knowledge from grassroots to global level.

While the networks and federations of the grassroots communities and organizations have been proved to be successful in dealing with crisis, it is getting increasingly difficult for them to maintain relations with the newly imposed notion of online meetings. We the privileged ones are constantly meeting online and doing business. But the grassroots organizations which also intend to be part of these global discussions are not being able to do so based on social, economic and geographical barriers. This again leads to the exclusion of voices of the vulnerable who can't access and afford ICT services.

Covid-19 induced digital divide may also result in additional power asymmetry between developed and developing countries. Digital negotiations through climate talks, summit or conferences may continue in the post Covid-19 world at least for a few years leading to more and more exclusion and unheard voices. Besides, this could also hamper international cooperation and trust especially among LDCs which are fostered through face-to-face diplomacy.

Youths on the other hand have been proved to be very successful in raising their voice in social media against climate change. Much of the climate protest movement that attracted millions was built through social media. But with the new notion of online presence, youths in developing countries are facing a huge pressure for being online both for academic and social advocacy purposes.

As a result, they are facing challenges in affording expensive internet packages for videoconferencing as well as in managing time to be part of climate talks. Besides, availing the online meet-

ing platforms such as Zoom, Microsoft Teams etc are also beyond the affordability of most young people living in remote areas.

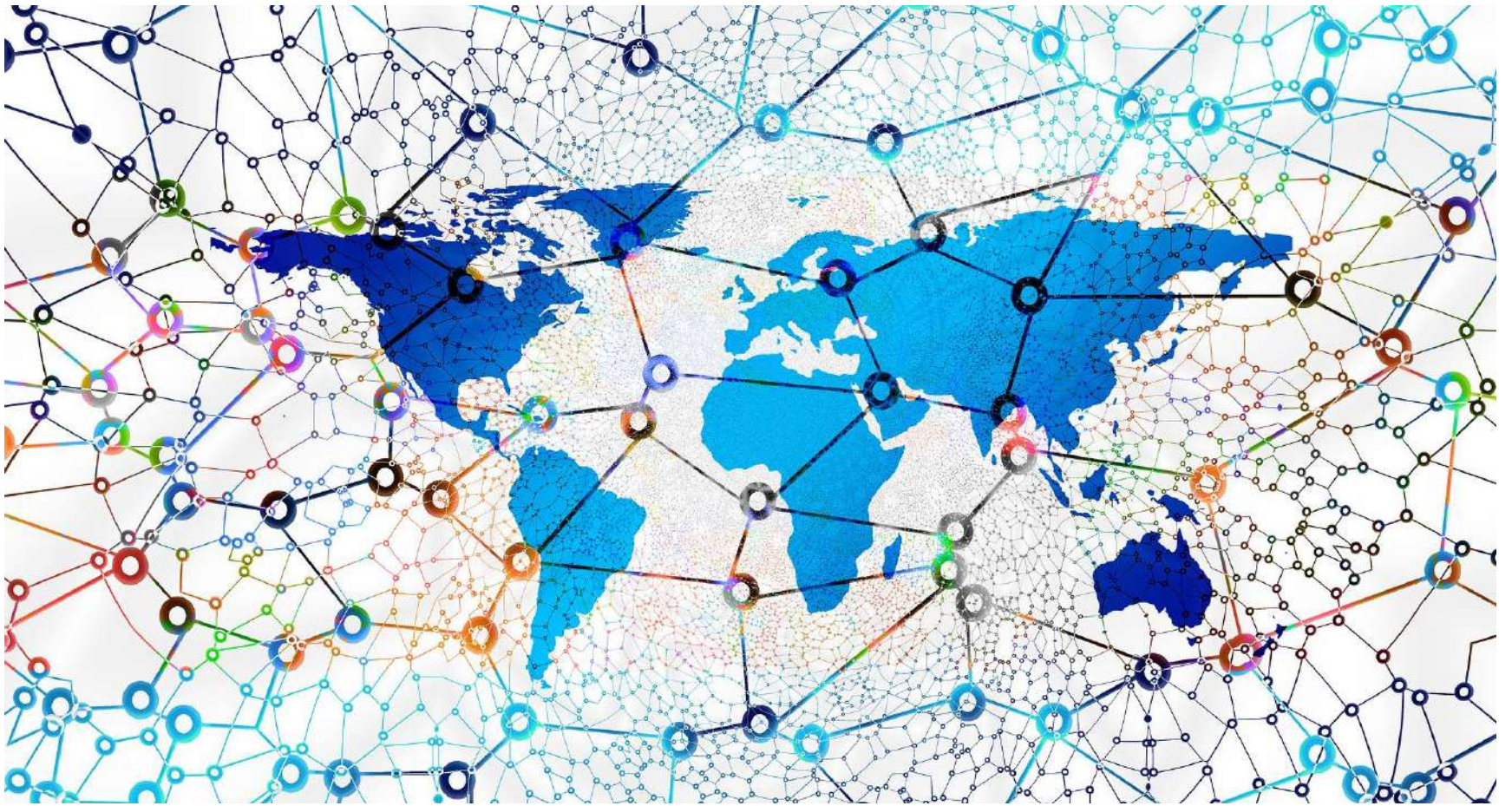
Tackling the digital divide

It is imperative to look beyond Covid-19 and envision changes to create a resilient and just society and better new normal in the face of future crises such as climate change. Tackling climate change will take an array of resources, access to the internet is definitely one of them which will allow us to connect, share information and build collective resilience in the years to come. To bring positive changes, all the stakeholders-government, private sectors, academics, civil society need to collaborate in redesigning the existing model.

In general, policy makers can ensure universal access to ICTs by removing barriers, while the private-sector, civil society and individuals need to make policies work. The private sectors and service providers can bring in innovative ideas regarding provision of affordable access and various options for different income groups in all geographical capacities.

Academia and civil societies can play a crucial role in capacity building especially for vulnerable groups in acquiring digital skills. Global donors as well as national investors should also make more and more investments to boost our efforts to close the digital divide and make the internet universal, affordable, open, and safe. ●

Shahrin currently works as a Senior Research Officer at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD). Her research interest lies in community resilience building, gender and climate change, and sustainable development.



PIXABAY

Graduation of Bangladesh out of the LDC status

While many countries are entering the fourth industrial revolution, many of our expatriate workers do not even know how to use washing machines

Mizan R Khan

On June 22 UNDP, Dhaka organized an online discussion on the graduation of Bangladesh from the LDC status in view of Covid-19. The event was attended by a good number of local and foreign participants and the panelists represented the government, private sector, research and NGO communities and development partners.

Dr Fahmida, Executive Director of the Centre for Policy Dialogue, presented the key-note where she highlighted the benefits enjoyed as an LDC through international support measures (ISMs) under the GSP provisions, and the potential losses to be incurred after graduation. The negative fallout from Covid-19 is a significant break to the rate that our economy was growing. Also The Daily Star just published a research-based article, written by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya and his colleague,

explaining the promises and pitfalls of graduation.

After a long discussion over the pros and cons in times of this pandemic, it was agreed on that ultimately the decision to graduate is a political choice. Here I will mention a few points that Prof Mohammad Abdul Momen representing the BGMEA raised as a panelist.

He agreed for the graduation to go ahead in 2024, but specifically broached a few factors that should justify Bangladesh continuing to enjoy the LDC benefits even after graduation for 7 to 10 years, as GSP+. He put forward several arguments for consideration by our development partners: 1) garment sector, being the mainstay of our export economy, contributes significantly to women empowerment, as an overwhelming majority of workers are women; 2) contribution of Bangladesh to global peace-keeping, 3) the Rohingya refugees imposing a hugely extra burden on our society, and 4) unequivocal stand of

Bangladesh in the global fight against terrorism. These are certainly all valid points.

Here I will add another factor for which Bangladesh really deserves special consideration: being one of the most vulnerable countries in the world to climate change, Bangladesh has turned itself as a model of adaptation and resilience. This has been recognized globally and there are huge interests beyond our border to learn from our experience.

We have some external support for achieving this, but it is quite insignificant compared to what the government of Bangladesh itself invests in addressing climate change. More than 80% of the money spent for the purpose comes from domestic sources.

The latest budget FY 2020-21 has allocated 7.5% of its total, amounting to about \$3 billion. This is a huge amount for our exchequer, particularly when it is battered so badly by the Covid crisis. Bangladesh as a nano-emitter of green-



Research at the Centre for Policy Dialogue shows that Bangladesh has the second lowest labour productivity even in the LDCs

house gases is condemned to suffer as an innocent victim, for which we have to mend almost by ourselves. This is absolutely unfair and unjust.

To rectify this injustice, at least partially, I will propose for an instrument, which is over two decades' old - it is debt for nature swaps, initiated under the US Tropical Forest Conservation Act 1998. This instrument is based on non-payment of foreign debts, and instead, the amount is converted into local currency and invested for nature conservation. Based on this instrument, actually the Arannayak Foundation was established in Bangladesh back in 2003, and is co-managed by the Secretary, Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and the Director of the USAID.

I will propose the same for conversion of the debts currently incurred by Bangladesh to different donors for addressing climate change impacts and strengthening our resilience through effective adaptation. This can be called debt for adaptation swaps (DAS).

Actually, a huge number of global civil society members, after the coronavirus invasion, have submitted a memo to all our development and financier partners to cancel debt service payments, which amount to \$6bn a year. Had this money been invested in strengthening the still fledgling adaptation model in an extremely climate disaster-prone country, the whole world could learn lessons from it. Isn't it a worthy invest-

ment for global benefit?

Next, I will focus on a realistic pathway that Bangladesh may take in transitioning to a middle-income country by the next decade. Available literature on the pathways that the graduating LDCs have traversed are synthesized into three trajectories: The first pathway has been rapid economic growth, based mainly on natural resource exploitation.

The second one related to achieving rapid growth on a combination of tourism and natural resources. This is the path taken mostly by the small island LDCs. The third pathway was characterized by increased investment in development of human capital and structural transformation, which engendered a move away from low-productivity agriculture into higher-productivity manufacturing and service sectors, leading to more diversified economies.

I think for Bangladesh, this third pathway can be the game changer in view of its huge potential demographic dividends, just waiting to be reaped. But Bangladesh still is not being able to benefit much, not just because of relatively lower investments in education and skill development, compared to other South Asian countries, but also because of weak policy-planning and its non-committal enforcement.

The importance of skill-based education was highlighted by the UN Resident Coordinator Mia Seppo in her concluding remarks of the June 22 meeting.



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Unfortunately, Bangladesh cuts a very sorry figure in science and technical education. Research at the Centre for Policy Dialogue shows that Bangladesh has the second lowest labour productivity even in the LDCs, despite the fact that it commands almost 18% of its population and produces almost 20% of the total LDC GDPs.

Let me give an example. While the expatriate labour force from the Philippines comprises about 60% that of Bangladeshi workers abroad, that country enjoys double the remittance of Bangladesh. This is simply because Filipino workers speak English, and command basic, technical skills. There are now growing opportunities for

temporary and circular international labor migration. The Colombian model of "Temporary and Circular Labor Migration (TCLM)" between Columbia and Spain, supported by the IOM, may inform a model adapted to the Bangladeshi context.

Some reports suggest that student enrollment in science education is declining. While the world at large and many countries are entering into the fourth industrial revolution, many of our expatriate workers do not even know how to use washing machines or other simple gadgets. Therefore, this is the area where Bangladesh as a graduating country needs to target as the thrust sector. Better skills-based education and training can only contribute to structural transformation of the economy, with the utterly needed economic diversification, which enables a move up the ladder of value addition in the supply chain. This requires establishing close linkages between employers and graduates from tertiary education and graduates from technical and vocational education and training institutions.

Unless the politically dominated administrators in higher secondary and tertiary education change their predictions from building buildings, toward increasing research budgets and establishing state-of-the-art Labs, we may not be able to ride faster the third pathway to graduation, on the eve of the 50th independence anniversary of Bangladesh. ●

Mizan R Khan is the Deputy Director at the International Centre for Climate Change & Development (ICCAD), Independent University, Bangladesh and the Program Director, LDC Universities Consortium on Climate Change (LUCC)



File photo of Bangladeshi migrant workers holding passports.

SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Need for research collaboration in a climate vulnerable world

How a Bangladesh-UK research collaboration is going to help in addressing and taking actions against climate change impacts

Samina Islam

Climate change is posing enormous challenges for the whole world and to overcome these challenges, the world needs to come together for finding solutions and implementing actions. Countries around the world are collectively working to address the climate emergency through international climate negotiations and agreements as well as through collaboration among climate researchers and experts.

The idea of collaborative research is not new; it happens nationally and internationally around the world among researchers, academics and university students. The appeal for research collaboration comes from a variety of interests - developing new ideas, sharing knowledge and expertise, building skills and capacity, having access to specialized equipment or gaining new sources for funding.

As climate change is a global issue that needs immediate action, collaboration among researchers from different parts of the world can play a vital role in generating effective climate research that can be transformed into policy. Research provides evidence and collaborative research has the potential to develop more systematic evidence, which can then be used to pursue policy arguments and practical action on the ground. In this regard, collaborative research efforts between universities with a focus on climate change is a timely demand.

To address the need for tackling climate change impacts, capacity building and translating research into policy plans and actions - the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and the London School of Economics (LSE) jointly hosted a webinar as part of London Climate Action Week 2020.

The discussion ensued a proposed 5-year-long project to facilitate trans-disciplinary and equitable collaboration among researchers in Bangladesh and the UK to address climate change impacts, poverty and development.

The roundtable discussion included

distinguished experts and researchers from the UK and Bangladesh including Prof Saleemul Huq, Director at ICCCAD, Independent University of Bangladesh; Prof David Lewis, LSE; Emma Howard Boyd, Chair of Environment Agency, DEFRA, UK; Saida Muna Tasneem, Bangladesh's High Commissioner in the UK; Judith Herbertson, Head of DFID, Bangladesh; Terry Cannon, IDS, University of Sussex; Prof Julian Williams, Durham University; and Prof AKM Saiful Islam, BUET.

This partnership will allow collaborative research work to be built from Bangladesh's experience of tackling extreme climatic events. In addition, Bangladesh's leading role in climate change adaptation and the Climate



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Vulnerable Forum (CVF) and the UK's presidency in COP26 as well as the history of the relationship between UK and Bangladesh researchers and universities - marks the relevancy of these two countries working together. The partnership will provide both countries with equal opportunities for capacity building and acquiring knowledge and expertise in regards to environment and climate change.

Linking universities in the UK and Bangladesh in order to generate high quality and effective climate research using functional data which can later be transformed into policy plans and actions is one of the main principles of this research collaboration - as expressed by Prof David Lewis.



This partnership will allow collaborative research work to be built from Bangladesh's experience of tackling extreme climatic events

from the participants' side as well - universities can act as an efficient bridge between the local and regional governments as well as play important roles in translating research into policy.

The voices of youth in regards to climate action have been very loud recently and their demands are being heard. It is important that they have a coherent platform to present their thoughts and ideas. Youth participation in governance and climate negotiations as well as in climate research is highly necessary as they will face the worst climate conditions; they need to be prepared and they need to be engaged.

Young researchers from Bangladesh and the UK universities who have keen interest in investigating climate change issues can learn and broaden their knowledge through this joint research program.

The aim of the program to translate "research into action" - can influence young researchers to generate feasible research works that can eventually be put into practice rather than conducting research which in the end do not result in any substantial actions. Also providing funding and scholarships can lead to greater opportunities for young researchers who want to contribute in tackling climate change.

Bangladesh is often at the frontline of climatic threats and vulnerability, and faced with the adverse effects of climate change, the country has been working towards enhancing its responsive capacity to such adversity. The country is often considered as a 'Climate Adaptation Lab' and has a lot of knowledge to share to the world.

A collaborative research initiative that promotes cross-learning between the UK and Bangladesh, with universities acting as the central hub for knowledge exchange and intervention, can revolutionize the climate change front for both countries while enhancing the long-term capacity. ●

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Heiko Maas talks to Daniela Schwarzzer at the Berlin Climate and Security Conference 2020 held in June without any on-site audience.

COURTESY

Climate change: A security discourse

Climate change is not merely an environmental problem

Sumaiya Binte Anwar

There is an emerging global consensus that climate change will stress the economic, social, and political systems that underpin each nation state.

“Climate Change is transforming the way we think about security. The present situation is a wakeup call that the climate crisis is no longer just an environmental and development issue, but it represents a core risk to global peace and security, and a key issue of foreign policy. It has become a global issue having a high-ranking concern on the list of priorities for Germany”, said the German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas in the Berlin Climate and Security Conference 2020.

A first part of the 2020 Berlin Climate and Security Conference held in June 23-24, hosted by The German Federal Foreign Office, in partnership with adelphi and the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research (PIK), brought together leading figures from several sectors through two scientific workshops and a high-level political segment. It discussed the growing risks that climate change presents for peace and security, and the need for quick and decisive action to prevent and minimize climate-related conflict.

Prof Ottman Edenhofer, Director,

PIK reminded us to look beyond known climate related risks. Drawing on the conclusions from scientific evidence, he emphasized that we are likely underestimating the implications of climate change for security. In this age of Anthropocene, the climate-related security risks will no longer occur in isolation. They will continue to come as tele connected shocks linked to a scarcity of global public goods and overuse of global commons.

These risks emerge in interaction with other factors and has consequences that reach the very heart of the climate security agenda: competition over local resource, livelihood insecurity, human mobility, engagement in illegal coping mechanism, extreme weather events, poorly designed (climate and security) policies, weak or failing governance, food shortages, price volatility in globally traded food staples leading to intensified competition for food, water and energy in regions where resources are already stretched to the limit.

Raychelle Awuor Omamo, Secretary for Foreign Affairs, Kenya, addressed the nexus between climate change and security, very evident in Africa, where a merger of threat prevails with climate change operating as a threat multiplier. She cautioned the member states to focus more clearly on the benefits of early action.

United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees Filippo Grandi welcomed the focus on forced displacement as one of the consequences of climate change, which shows the urgency of the climate emergency, and its impact on peace and stability.

Prof Ottman Edenhofer believes this is an opportunity to rebuild the infrastructure integrating the various risk rescue packages into a green recovery plan which would have the potential of generating human prosperity within the planetary boundary strengthening the control on global commons.

It is important to tele-connect all-risk aspects and figure out feedback loops among these issues. Minister Maas added that maintaining peace does not mean managing armed conflict only. In fact, previous British Defence and Security reviews have already noted the importance of looking beyond traditional definitions of security to consider things like “social inequality and exclusion, demographic changes, rapid and unplanned urbanisation, climate change, and global economic and other shocks.

Ine Eriksen Søreide, Norwegian Minister for Foreign Affairs, expressed her surprise that climate security is not a frequent topic in UN Security Council debates, compared to how present the conversation on climate threat multi-

pliers was with military officials in her previous role at the Norwegian Ministry of Defence.

UN Peacekeeping is an important part of the international community’s response to the complex equation of climate change and peace and security.



Minister Maas added that maintaining peace does not mean managing armed conflict only

Eight of the ten countries hosting the biggest multilateral peace operations are located in areas highly exposed to climate change (SIPRI).

Whether it is changes in water tables, desertification or movement of populations, the blue helmets are increasingly on the frontlines of these climate-related crises. Bangladesh is the second largest contributor of uniformed personnel to UN Peacekeeping. It currently contributes more than 6,400 military and police personnel to the UN peacekeeping operations in nine peacekeeping missions around the world, further underlining the importance of mainstreaming climate change knowledge in the military sector of our country for ensuring the success of these peacekeeping missions.

Kenyan Secretary for Foreign Affairs Raychelle Awuor Omamo called for a strengthening of the UN's peacekeeping mechanisms to enable peacekeepers to deal with climate change issues in their areas of operations. "The UN needs to reflect on whether its peacekeeping efforts are fit for purpose to address climate change threats", she added. Therefore, the peacekeepers and the military establishments need to develop a better understanding about biodiversity and should recognize mainstream climate



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change as a "threat multiplier" in their operational processes.

For improved reporting and risk analysis, The Global Risk and Foresight Assessment has been launched in this conference with the aim to strengthen partnership between science and politics that will set up a roadmap on how to better assess climate change security risks and create a pathway for evidence-based decision making.

The Security Council charged with the maintenance of international peace

and security have key roles to play. Primarily, there should be a strong belief of the nexus between Climate Change and Peace and security which should be mainstreamed in the decision-making process and agenda of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). UNSC should also be looking at ways where there can be better collaboration between the regional arrangements like AU-peace and security council and UN peace and security council as most conflicts take place in Africa.

In support of the Berlin Climate and Security Conference 2020, several high-level representatives of governments and international organisations have contributed statements. Bangladesh has sought a "bold decision" from the UNSC to ensure security and peace across nations addressing climate challenges through partnership and collaboration.

In terms of climate change, Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world. "If millions are uprooted due to sea level rise, it will be a security risk not only for Bangladesh but also for the region," warned Foreign Minister Dr AK Abdul Momen in his video statement issued for the Berlin Climate and Security Conference 2020.

As a follow-up of the conference,

From September 7 to October 2, the second part of the BCSC 2020 will reflect on how more comprehensive risk assessments could support forward-looking and preventative foreign and security policy.

In this Anthropocene, it is vital for those in power to understand the interplay between drivers of insecurity and act accordingly. But no state is currently equipped to do this. Effective multi stakeholder's collaboration can make a unique contribution in building a shared understanding of what an unstable climate will mean for our individual and collective security.

Moving forward, as we begin to build a low-carbon global economy with fullest possible understanding of all the implications of climate change, including security imperatives, the decisions we make and the actions we take, in whatever forum, will be better, stronger and more effective. Equally, failure to address these issues in the relevant forum will further exacerbate the security implications of climate change. ●

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Bangladeshi engineering troops receive their UN medals from the Head of UNMISS, David Shearer.

UNMISS