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Climate Tribune



■ **YOUTH IN CLIMATE ACTION**

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Editor's note

Dear readers,

The threat of climate change is materializing right in front of us. And the people that will have to live in this upcoming grim reality are the youth of today.

So, the involvement of the youth in climate action is only natural. This issue of Climate Tribune turns the spotlight on this deserving subject.

We hear from the youth climate activists themselves. They talk about their own journeys, report about their activism, and share their visions for the future.

Their stories are as inspirational as they are instructive. And they deserve to reach a broad audience. ■



After cyclone YAAS hit Padma Pukur, Patakhali, Shyamnagar, the local people and the youth try to organize themselves to repair the dam beside their home before it is too late as the rising tidal water can enter the village from that side at any moment.

PHOTO S M SHAHIN ALOM

INTERVIEW

YOUTH AT THE FOREFRONT OF CLIMATE ACTION

INTERVIEW WITH THREE YOUNG CLIMATE ACTIVISTS FROM BANGLADESH

“ Sometimes, the local and national level youths are unable to include their voice in the international platform due to a lack of financial facilities ”

Climate Tribune Desk

Adiba Bintey Kamal

Adiba Bintey Kamal is working as a project associate on the youth and climate finance program at International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD). She is also working as a country coordinator for Bangladesh for COY16. She has completed her graduation in disaster and human security management and did masters in development studies at the Bangladesh University of Professionals.

What drove you to become a climate activist?

During the third year of my undergrad, while studying disaster and human security management, I had developed a passion for working as a youth activist to address issues like climate change, human security and awareness about plastic pollution. Then, I started looking for opportunities to get connected and work as a youth.

After a while, I learned about the RISE youth leadership program and participated in it as a participant in the final year of my undergrad. This was my first step towards climate activism. The one-year program helped me to enrich my knowledge and expertise in this area. After the leadership program ended, I got the chance to use my learnings as a researcher and later, RISE-II youth leadership group facilitator. This is how my journey as a youth climate activist began.

How would you describe the responsibilities of being a country coordinator?

Since last October, I have been working as a country coordinator of Bangladesh for Conference of Youth (COY)16. COY16 is the annual gathering of YOUNGO members, the official Youth Constituency to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). This is the first time a youth activist like me is participating at COY16 and representing Bangladesh.

As a country coordinator, my responsibilities are planning with the both COY16 coordination team and Bangladeshi universities, coordinating meetings with the national universities and youth-led NGO's, and mobilizing grassroots outreach and engagement of the youth in Bangladesh to discuss the COY16 activities. Apart from that, developing different fund-raising activities to raise funds for the Bangladesh team for COY16 is also listed as my responsibility.

What are the challenges you think youths your age face while taking part in activism?

The first step is always very challenging, to work as a climate activist becomes difficult as the youths work alone in this field. Furthermore, knowledge, institutional and financial resources are also a barrier for them to raise their voice. Sometimes, the local and national level youths are unable to include their voice in the international platform due to a lack of financial facilities. This challenge leads to a negative impact on activism. As a result, youth's mostly lost interest in working in climate action.

What would your message be for youths in climate action?

Each step will have barriers and challenges, but fighting with it might open a new window for the youths to work as climate activists as challenges are always associated with every success. So, taking the first step is very important to become a climate activist as this step leads an individual to what they want to do.

Climate activists should have confidence and courage in raising their voice on local, national, and international platforms. In activism, the most important thing is that it doesn't only bound in one form, so anyone interested can become a climate activist according to their interest because future climate action entirely depends on them.

Do you have any goals in mind as a country coordinator?

As I grow professionally, I want to promote more youth-led activities in the climate change arena because we need more innovative solutions to address this crisis. I want to establish a platform where I'll be able to capacitate the youths from both local and national levels and then connect them with the international youth and the international platform. I strongly believe that by involving the youth, we can pull the change that we need and want to see in future.

Shohail Bin Saifullah

Shohail Bin Saifullah is currently working at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) under the Youth Program and Climate Finance Program as a Project Associate. Shohail is also a coordinating member of the "Global Youth Engagement Program", a youth capacity building program jointly under Penn State University Sustainability Institute and Club of Rome. He is a graduate

from Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB) under the program of Environmental Science and Management.

What drove you to become a climate activist?

I believe activism comes innately to some, to others it comes through experience and capacity training. I happen to fall under the latter. During my formative years as an undergraduate student, I had the opportunity of realizing my passion for climate change, especially the human dynamics within climate change.

While studying climate change, I realized that there is a significant lack of youth inclusion in climate dialogue. Furthering from there, during my tenure as the president of a student-led club at my university, Green Planet Club, I fell in love with social work and volunteerism. It became clear to me that to have an actual impact on the youth in climate advocacy, youth need more opportunities to undergo capacity development.

Once they are capacitated, we need to provide prominent platforms where they can have their voices heard. From the club, we were able to give that "better platform" where we facilitated youth capacity development through the utilization of club and university resources, and I believe that's where my journey began.

What are the challenges you think youths your age face while taking part in activism?

Youth voices and youth actions are of vital importance in the current climate change advocacy arena, as today's youth will be the shepherds of the world tomorrow. It is high time that we move past the idea of mass individualism and try to come together as a community.

When it comes to capacitating the youth towards understanding and being proactive climate advocates, there are mainly 4 hurdles that come in the way:

Education: Proper understanding and education of the topic are of utmost importance, as passion and drive will be underutilized when there is a lack of quality education.

Institutional barriers: Even if youth have access to proper education, they require the support or backing of a credible institution. Having proper institutional backing will allow the youth to take part in stakeholders' meetings or to avail access to relevant platforms.

Lack of credibility: People tend not to give space to youth because of their lack of credibility but taking the above into consideration the two points can be addressed, their acceptance can be enhanced.

Lack of finance: Considering the fact that in the majority of cases, funds are controlled by governmental agencies or donor organizations, youth are required to sort through many issues to gain financing for their projects. However, if we are to capacitate and empower the youth, acquiring grants will become much easier.

What would your message be for youths in climate action? Being a part of the coordination team of the Global Youth Engagement Program under Penn State University Sustainability Institute and Club of Rome and through my work in youth in climate change, I would like to state the following for the youth who will be reading this article:

- Youth voices are absolutely necessary for tackling climate change, but your voices and opinions will not be heard if you do not try and take initiative towards making a change. Your stake at the table will not be given to you, you have to earn a seat at the table.
- Being an activist and being passionate about climate change is not enough, hone your knowledge and skills so that when you do speak up, your voice does not get sidelined. Become an expert, so that when you speak people will have to stop and listen to what you have to say.

Sarah Farheen Khan

Sarah Farheen Khan is an environmentalist and climate activist currently serving at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development. She is also a member of the Global Coordination Team of YOUNGO (Children and Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, UNFCCC). Sarah has been invited to speak at several international conferences for her active participation in advocating for climate action, gender equity, health, and wellbeing.

What drove you to become a climate activist?

Throughout my childhood, I've been passionate about social work and was involved in volunteering. Later, I reached the decision to pursue my higher education in Environmental Science, thinking it will somehow lead a way to help the society and grass root level community. During my study, I was given full exposure to field education and hands-on experience in climate-vulnerable areas of my country. Whether that be for collecting data, measuring pH value of water, soil, or identifying issues for biodiversity loss.

And being able to visit the most vulnerable sites and interact with individuals recovering emotionally from disasters is what actually motivated me to be an activist. Then and there I made up my mind to be the voice of the voiceless. And started being vocal about the vulnerabilities we deal with in climate change susceptible countries and how essential it has become to shift towards sustainability.

“ Considering the fact that in the majority of cases, funds are controlled by governmental agencies or donor organizations, youth are required to sort through many issues to gain financing for their projects ”

How would you describe the goal and responsibilities of being a country coordinator?

What we do as country representatives is in the name of the group itself, YOUNGO (YOUTH NGO), we are an independent and international platform and a network consisting of hundreds of young individuals below the age of 35, as well as youth groups and non-governmental organizations. Where we collectively aim to inspire, empower, and mobilize a generational movement of young people to take action on climate change.

Hence, we as country coordinators, encourage more youths to choose climate activism, from our respective regions. And provide them with an international platform to showcase their positive and change-making ideas.

Even though we are in the middle of a pandemic, our determination for climate action has been the same as many of the root causes of climate change may also increase the risk of the COVID 19 scenario. We held virtual meetings to share knowledge and build capacity through the working groups, free to join for all members. Namely health, loss and damage, women & gender, NDC enhancement, Ocean's voice. These working groups create an evidence base for best practices. This is done through the assessment of existing knowledge, generating new knowledge, identification of emerging issues, in addition to effective use and dissemination through webinars, workshops, conferences and of course with opportunities to publish our work.

What are the challenges that you think youths your age face while taking part in activism?

I feel youth and adolescents are the passive victims of climate change. Now that climate change is a widely discussed topic, we youths are very much careful about our consumption and are unhesitant about taking a step towards green growth, but we belong to an adult-led society where all the negotiations and important decisions are watched by the adults.

This would have been fine, but with backwardness in intergenerational equity, our concerns, consents, and viewpoints are often undermined and not supported, even though it is us, the last generation who actually can combat climate change.

Another great barrier that hinders youth engagement would be a lack of financial resources. To authenticate our demands, we need to conduct research but we as youth receive little to zero funding from well-established organizations which leaves us to do most of the research and participatory based works voluntarily.

Do you have any message for youths in climate action?

The recent climate-induced bushfires and flash floods in well-developed countries are an indication of the final warning, that the worst is yet to come. The latest IPCC report says it all, if we don't mend our lifestyles, the next hit will be even worse. The youths in Climate Action should have the ability to speak up and point out the pitfall of climate change.

The more knowledge we have, the more we can influence the crowd as well as convince the political leaders. It is a global challenge we are going through, and we have to work together to battle against this crisis. ■

“To authenticate our demands, we need to conduct research but we as youth receive little to zero funding from well-established organizations”



This photo is from Gabura, Satkhira after the cyclone Amphan. The old woman's house used to be where she was lying down, but due to the cyclone, she lost most of her valuable possessions. With nothing to look forward to and no hope, she lies down on what remains of her possession.

NATURAL DISASTER AFTERMATH IN THE BANGLADESHI SOUTH

SEEN THROUGH THE CAMERA OF A LOCAL CLIMATE ACTIVIST

Photos and story by S M Shahin Alom

My journey as a climate activist started in my childhood. I was born and raised in Satkhira, considered amongst the most climate vulnerable parts of Bangladesh. When I was eight years old, cyclone Aila took place in this region. I still remember that one night the water level rose to my bed, and I got terrified.

The following day different organizations were distributing relief in my area. But unfortunately, I couldn't get any relief as I was only eight then. Since then, I have wanted to know how to cope with this situation for my survival. Currently, I am working as a climate activist and raising my voice through my camera lens using social media as my platform.

These images reflect the fight of survival for the

people in the south. As a youth climate activist from Satkhira I have taken up my camera as a weapon in my fight against climate change. I have been actively posting photos and videos to create awareness on the lives of the communities here.

My work has been picked up by many people from social media, furthermore it has created opportunities for me to work as a child journalist in UNICEF, Bangladesh generation parliament, Bangladesh News. Currently I am working as a volunteer in Jalabayu Parishad and I am motivated to continue my passion and raise awareness about Climate Justice for us.

The following photos are some of the images from South Bangladesh, on how youths have self organized to help their community survive the onslaught of cyclones.

Cyclone YAAS



This photo is from Koyra after cyclone Yass left the people in the area flooded with tidal water, the local youths organized themselves and collected funds through Facebook live to provide relief to the communities who can't get any food.



This picture was taken right after cyclone YAAS when a father was taking his children to their home. They spent the night at the local mosque as the water rose. The father is taking the younger child on his shoulder as she can't swim, and the elder one is taking his pets (ducks and chicken) in the drum. Both the father and the son are trying to protect their loved ones.



This woman from Gabura, Lehubunia suffered a lot from damage to her house due to cyclone Amphan, and again this year after cyclone Yaas she lost whatever remained of her house. This house used to mean everything to her and now she has nothing.

Cyclone Amphan



This picture was taken at noon at Bonnotola, Padmapukur after Amphan. The people are sitting on the dam as their houses are mostly washed away with the tidal water. Unaware of how they will manage their next meal, they sit there with lots of tension and anxiety about what is going to happen next.



This photo is from Pratabnagar, Ashashoni, Sathkhira. Two days after the cyclone Amphan made landfall, the family was able to eat by cooking a meal, as most of their house went under the water post the cyclone. The woman tied her sari to light up her stove which is made of mud.



As the flood water entered the village of Ashashoni, Pratabnagar, Sathkhira the day after the cyclone Amphan, people take all the essential things and move to another place to take shelter as their houses are about to get submerged in flood water.



This family from Pratabnagar is migrating to another place right after cyclone Amphan, taking all their essential things along the way. The family might not come back to this place again. This village of Pratabnagar is experiencing a higher rate of migration as people are moving away from here.



This photo is from the area named Bonnotola, beside the Kholpetua river. The whole family went to the cyclone shelter to take refuge from Amphan. After waking up the next day, they came to see their house in tatters. Having most of their belongings damaged, they don't have anything now.



This family has been living on the road for the last few days as the water came inside their house. Their house is in a low area. They are going to see the condition of their home. Most of their belongings have gone under water.



Photo from Ashashuni, Protabnagar. With uncertainties ahead, the older adults are waiting to cross the river to reach the other side. Both of them are drenched from the flood waters, and are waiting for the boat.



The man in the picture from Gabura is building his house again, which is right beside the river. Every year he has to rebuild the house because it gets damaged in cyclones.



Photo from Bonnotola, near Kholpetua river. For the third or fourth time, a cyclone has taken the house of this older man.



This photo is from Betkash, the damage that was done from the cyclone Amphan left the embankment damaged, still now it has not been repaired. During high tide the area gets flooded till now. The family in the photo is trying to go back to their home after finishing some work. Both of their children are small, and they are afraid of the water. With the fear of the children falling into the water the parents are struggling to cross this flooded terrain.



A day after cyclone amphan occurred, People are taking their belongings from the cyclone shelter. In this frame, three generations are walking to their home after the next day of cyclone Amphan with lots of uncertainties. The three generations witness the consequences of the natural disaster cyclone.



Photo from Datinagachi, Burgoalini, most of the people living beside the Kholpetua river depend on the Sundarbans for their livelihood and have their own boat. After cyclone amphan, this family couldn't go to any cyclone shelter as it is far away from their house, so they stayed at their boat.

S M Shahin Alom is a climate activist and photojournalist.

ACTIVISM AROUND THE WORLD



PIXABAY

SMALL STEPS IN ACHIEVING CLIMATE JUSTICE

WHY EVERY VOICE MATTERS

Climate change is the reality of today. In this article I am going to explain my journey in the climate change sector, why I chose climate justice, the power of a voice and what climate action means to me. I share my current engagement and challenges from my activities across the globe.

Although we did less to contribute to it and have limited policy power in the decision-making process, it is the ultimate crisis that our future will depend on. In some parts of the globe, the climate change injustice is exacerbated by other community challenges such as gender, economics, peace, education, and culture that impact a complex topic.

In the video, I explain my journey as an Eco-Feminist, Impact-driven actor in the environment and climate change sector aiming to serve the global community, especially marginalized communities. I talk about why I choose climate justice and what climate action means, especially as a global south youth whose community is more exposed to the negative impacts of climate change. I share my current engagement, experience, lessons learned and challenges so as to inspire youth from across the globe to know that there is a level of our contribution in making the world a better place, and most of the time, this starts as simple as becoming a “Voice of Change”.

My name is Ineza Umuhoza Grace; I am an Eco-Feminist, impact-driven, self-motivated actor in the environment and climate change sector, serving the global community especially vulnerable and marginalized groups based in Rwanda. I engage my work in contributing to climate justice through being a voice to the voiceless community in the decision-making process, showcasing lived experience of climate change impact from the frontline youth, and conducting action to regenerate hope in the community.

The exposure to climate change impacts in my childhood left me curious and dedicated to understanding the environment. I was below the age of six when an intensive rainfall associated with solid wind destroyed my family house’s ceiling. I remember my bedroom becoming a lake and seeking shelter in our neighbour’s house.

When I finished high school, like so many of my colleagues, we wanted to be electrical engineers, mechanical engineers, architects, and all the fields that link to a STEM background. I watched the news, and in the rural part of Rwanda, flooding and erosion were extreme to the point that the community was in a state of emergency, and most of them were women and children. That is when I decided to pursue my university course in an environmental field to learn how best to contribute to saving the community. It was a pain for me to see many children having to live the same choke as I did.

I pursue water and environmental engineering at the University of Rwanda. In 2017, I pitched my idea on “How I

want to contribute” to my university and local partners. My idea was to connect young Rwandans who commit to work in the environment protection field regardless of their educational background to minimize the environmental education gap and promote vibrant youth participation in the sector. The idea resulted from my nomination among the 25 young emerging leaders across Africa. I was trained to become a leader who serves the community and participated in the United Nations conference on desertification to sign the global declaration of youth’s contribution in achieving land neutrality.

To date, the idea I pitched is “The Green Fighter”. A Rwandan youth lead an NGO in the environment protection sector. We are a team of young people from different educational backgrounds committed to educating

“We are a team of young people from different educational backgrounds committed to educating ourselves on how we can work together to promote environmental stability in our community”

ourselves on how we can work together to promote environmental stability in our community. Our collective engagement can be clustered into Project design and implementation, environmental education, training and advocacy. In the past years, we conducted more than ten community activities to promote environmental education and awareness in the community; our activities reached 3,500 young people in Rwanda, shared four blogs, and advocated on the national and international level.

Being a global south female leader of a youth NGO is undoubtedly associated with challenges. Starting from questions like “Do you have the expertise to understand the nature of the work you want to engage into”, “How can you be a leader, you are a woman?”, “Aren’t you too ambitious for a global south youth organization?”, “How will you secure funding for your engagement? There are practically no funds available!”, “Isn’t this a hobby?”. All of this and similar ones made us stronger and encouraged us to stay true to our commitment and prove that we can actively contribute on the national and international levels.

As a team, we increase our self-driven commitment by reading more especially in the international climate dialogue, analysing what tends to be our community’s limitation (most of the time our voice is not represented on the decision-making table). We focused on doing better what we can (sharing community voices, explaining community concerns on the decision-making table). We worked closely with our local institutions, which made us capable of giving a global contribution.

In 2020, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, we realized that climate injustice is the most threatening aspect. This is associated with the severity of the climate change impacts referred to as “loss and damage” as the global climate inaction, especially from developed countries, leading to environmental instability and the uncertainty of the future of our planet.

We started what is currently known as the “loss and damage youth coalition”, aiming to shape a borderless youth partnership in driving action to address loss and damage. Our activities are centered on changing the extent of climate change impacts by sharing the frontline youth lived experience.

Conveying the global youth demands to global leaders to seek climate justice in open letters and training youth across the globe to increase their knowledge on the issue. To date, we have a presence in more than 45 countries with the number of 250 members, sent an open letter to the UK COP 26 presidency of COP and the USA government, and share youth experience in terms of blogs and public speaking. The challenge of a global youth initiative operating remotely is to do what we can in the best way, driving global youth ambition and contribution in achieving climate justice.

In conclusion, challenges for young actors, predominantly female in the climate sector, can’t be ignored. The motivation of young people to see a more just future for the next generation is vital to the point that we persist in the challenges. We learn, educate ourselves and connect beyond borders to strengthen our support in convey tangible activities for our community. ■

community-based in Rwanda. In 2017 she started the Rwandan Youth NGO “The Green Fighter” with the aim to increase an active contribution in the creation of a better and protected environment in the community. In 2020, she co-founded the “Loss and Damage Youth Coalition” aiming to create a borderless youth partnership to seek climate justice through taking action on loss and damage.

“We started what is currently known as the “loss and damage youth coalition”, aiming to shape a borderless youth partnership in driving action to address loss and damage”

Ineza is an eco-feminist impact-driven actor in the climate change and environment protection sector serving the global

HOW I BECAME A CLIMATE ACTIVIST IN PAKISTAN

"I BELIEVE THAT BEING A CLIMATE ACTIVIST IS NOT A COMPETITION, IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING KNOWN BY "EVERYONE", AND THERE IS NO ONE RIGHT WAY TO BE AN ACTIVIST."



PIXABAY

Zainab Zahid

Growing up in a traditional Pakistani family, I was always taught not to waste food, save water, buy what's necessary, and be responsible for my actions. While writing this, I am connecting dots that how unconsciously our cultural values inculcate the basic practices of respecting nature. However, reflecting back, I did not know much about climate change and how urgently we need climate action to adapt to the emerging climate crisis.

The only thing that stayed back with me is one of my science teachers telling us that global warming is increasing and there will be a time when rivers will run dry and only the land covered with glaciers will be green. Back then I always thought this to be an issue of the future but now I see this becoming a reality.

Fast forward to my young teen years, I chose Environmental Sciences for higher studies without much deliberation and did not get much involved in anything practical for good two years except academic stuff (looking back, I never knew the right way to do activism or get involved with the like-minded community). After doing some volunteer work and internships, I realized that I have far more of an ability to take this cause forward and mobilize local climate action.

Now, being an Environmental Scientist I feel very happy about my research work and journey of climate activism. I take the privilege to have represented Pakistan at the 26th Mock Conference of Parties (Mock COP26), be a member of the steering committee of a COP26 research fellow, be the Regional Coordinator for North, Central, and South Asia at the 16th UN Conference of Youth, and have participated in multiple events as a participant and as a speaker to share the concerns on the climate crisis.

Presiding the Environment Club of my university is among my favourite memories of youth engagement. I had the privilege to plan and execute massive public awareness campaigns with the participation of hundreds of volunteers which also helped transform my life (and hopefully of other volunteers too) as an environmentally conscious individual. Organizing multiple climate action events, motivating the team and volunteers to keep doing their work not just for numbers but for real environmental advocacy itself was a phenomenal experience. University being a hotspot of highly motivated like-minded individuals helped me to listen, learn, and act.

In Pakistan, a layperson does not have much knowledge on the impacts of climate change and how to adapt in response to extreme events. Realizing the gap, I have founded an informal youth group called Youth for Green Pakistan where we engage students on climate education and teach them the basic steps to bring change, starting from home. Building upon the very basic activities, we aim to further advance the work.

My engagement within YOUNGO (The Official Youth Constituency of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change - UNFCCC) helped me to connect with highly motivated and driven individuals, understand the UNFCCC processes, and amplify the youth voices at different events. I learn and derive inspiration from the young climate activists from across the world who are doing wonderful work to help build positive momentum in the climate movement.

Besides having worked my way up to a leadership position, putting myself out there and standing up for something I strongly believed was initially quite intimidating being a socially selective person. I believe that being a climate

“ I had the privilege to plan and execute massive public awareness campaigns with the participation of hundreds of volunteers which also helped transform my life ”

activist is not a competition, it's not about being known by “everyone”, and there is no one right way to be an activist. Activism is researching to collect scientific evidence, building a determined community of practice, managing a climate strike, or even just showing up for a street protest, unlike climate naysayers.

The struggle of being a climate advocate is not smooth. Besides all opportunities out there, there have been instances where tokenism could not be ruled out. Talking of top-down approach, rather than involving young people throughout the planning and execution process, they are invited just to speak at the launch events of reports on youth engagement. Given such a state of affairs, I feel very strong about communicating and articulating my thoughts on giving youth a chance for “real” engagement, listening to them, and helping them claim their spaces on the negotiation tables. ■

Zainab Zahid holds a Master's degree in Environmental Sciences. Her research interest lies in adaptation, climate education, and nature-based solutions. Can be reached at zainabzahid5@gmail.com.

PLASTIC POLLUTION: HOW DO I TRAIN THE GENERATION ALPHA?

IF PLASTIC CONSUMPTION WERE A COUNTRY, IT WOULD
BE THE FIFTH-HIGHEST EMITTER OF GREENHOUSE
GASES IN THE WORLD



Water carrier made of Adivasi vegetables.

LILLIAN TRIPURA

“By teaching my family's children, I understood how critical it is for young people like me to play a role in building a new generation of plastic-free living patterns and lessening previous generations' reliance on plastic”

Rayhana Akter

“Ariba, don't throw the bottle on the road. The sweepers have just cleaned the road.”

“Sorry, I'll give it to my uncle; he can plant a yellow flower tree for us.”

During a quiet lockdown day in 2020, my seven and eight-year-old niece and nephew had this talk. Seeing their intense enthusiasm, I seized the chance, recorded them discussing plastic pollution in a short video, and shared it on Facebook.

While filming the video, I saw the kids had a good understanding of the negative impacts of plastic and were putting it into practice. As the youngest child in the family, I had the fantastic fortune of learning to appreciate nature from my elders from a young age. While I was frustrated to watch the risks of expanding plastic pollution in pandemic due to my childhood love for nature, this curiosity in youngsters pushed me to teach them and other children about plastic pollution.

By teaching my family's children, I understood how critical it is for young people like me to play a role in building a new generation of plastic-free living patterns and lessening

previous generations' reliance on plastic. And, while fulfilling this essential responsibility, the most frequently asked question was, “Why talk so much about plastic bottles and polythene when we can't cope with disasters like storms, floods, river erosion, and salinity?”

According to the research, if plastic consumption were a country, it would be the fifth-highest emitter of greenhouse gases in the world (Zheng and Suh, 2019). Plastics are now accelerating the climate crisis and health risks beyond simply causing environmental pollution.

Every year, the manufacture of plastic emits 400 million tonnes of greenhouse gases. According to the Paris climate agreement (2015), global greenhouse emissions must be kept under a carbon budget of 420-570 gigatons of carbon to stay below 1.5°C objectives. According to the Center for International Environmental Law (CIEL) report, plastic will account for 13% of the overall carbon budget on our planet by 2050. Excessive use and consumption of single-use plastics resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic will likely exacerbate previous projections on plastic manufacturing.

Auritry: Thinking beyond plastics, towards a greener Bangladesh

To educate the youngsters, I commenced my voyage with Auritry, a non-profit organization working towards making a better, greener Bangladesh by combating plastic pollution. I started my journey as a research team member, developing study materials for a school project.

Later, I participated in a poster competition, including several grant programs. With the guidance and encouragement of Auritry's founder Sara Zabeen, I quickly became the research team trainer, owing to my environmental science background and strong research interest.

Through the Auritry platform, I've reached out to over 30 young people about plastic pollution, climate change, and SDG-6 thus far. Through Auritry's online classes, I teach university students about the effects of plastic pollution on climate change and achieving the SDGs. Auritry's creative efforts and dreams also include implementing the study project in Adivasi schools and supplying study materials in the Adivasi language.

As an outcome, Auritry aspires to preserve the Adivasi language and culture in Bangladesh. Currently, this study project is happening online where two Adivasi volunteers deliver content among both indigenous and non-indigenous students. Auritry hopes to teach non-indigenous people about Adivasi people's expertise and techniques in using biodegradable, environmentally benign materials to produce plastic alternatives. I currently work as a General Secretary and use my connections to help Auritry grow by collaborating with other environmental organizations and contributing to planning and strategy development.

Online advocacy journey



Aurity awareness-raising programs and activities to reduce plastic pollution in Bangladesh

COURTESY

“To educate the youngsters, I commenced my voyage with Aurity, a non-profit organization working towards making a better, greener Bangladesh by combating plastic pollution”

While training my kids and other youths, I realized that plastic pollution significantly impacts more than half of the SDGs. SDG-6 (Clean water and sanitation), for example, is affected by both plastic pollution and climate change. As a response, I began looking for online opportunities to learn about SDG-6 advocacy. WaterAid Bangladesh organized the - *Water and Climate Youth Advocate Training Initiative* to provide such

a chance. After the training, I shared my learnings with my Aurity peers, who vowed to promote WASH and climate advocacy knowledge in their communities.

Another eye-opening experience was participating in the first cohort of the Jolkona Program, co-organized by WaterAid Bangladesh and the Engineering Students Association of Bangladesh (ESAB). This collaboration aims to improve awareness and understanding of WASH and climate change issues, emphasizing developing the skill and competency of young aspiring female engineers for project execution and campaigns.

And it was mainly via the ICCAD’s RISE youth leadership program that I developed a desire to improve myself as a qualified youth. For over a year, I’ve learned the necessary knowledge and skills for climate action through this apprenticeship.

I have realized that change does not come overnight throughout my journey, but small changes can bring significant changes one day. Hence, individual-level understanding and action against plastic pollution will put us far ahead in climate combat while fighting the pandemic. ■

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WHY I PETITIONED THE GOVERNMENT TO IMPLEMENT THE BANGLADESH PLANETARY EMERGENCY DECLARATION

YOUNGEST CLIMATE PETITIONER OF BANGLADESH REFLECTS ON HER JOURNEY AS AN ENVIRONMENTAL ACTIVIST



PIXABAY

Aruba Faruque

I was only 13 years old when I started believing the climate crisis beyond a piece of scientific information as an emergency. Since then, whenever I close my eyes and think about the climate crisis, I see a grim, bleak and dire reality: A world in which many up to 200 species may go extinct every single day.

People are suffering from extreme hunger and poverty. Water is seemingly everywhere, but not a single drop to drink. Frequent floods, droughts, wildfires, heatwaves and super-cyclones affect the lives of millions of people on our planet. Children in super-congested refugee camps grow up without fundamental rights such as food, clothing, shelter,

education, clean water and environment. We are about to lose a generation without hope. Destruction of habitats and the entire ecosystem has been endangered due to the climate crisis. Airborne and waterborne diseases are killing millions of people every year.

Today when I am writing this article, I am a 15-year-old schoolgirl. I have always found myself incredibly concerned and passionate about climate justice as I have my entire future on the frontline of this crisis. In the last two years I have engaged as a climate activist, and this has made me realize that we, humans, stand accused of creating this catastrophe.

I could not merely sit and speculate how our future might turn out, nor could I wait for someone to act and for our

systems to change as it is my future and our planet that is at stake. It seemed more complicated to me to accept the reality of this crisis as a “fate” than to do something with a view to make the crucial changes happen. I felt that some pressure just came on me.

From now, 2021, we do not have much time to get on track for climate justice. Time is running out. So, we must act now with speed at least equivalent to that of a crisis.

Fridays For Future, the global climate movement launched by the-16-year-old Greta Thunberg, declared 19th March 2021 as the Global Day of Climate Strike “No more Empty Promises”. Indeed, with empty promises, an empty future is seen, and hope is nowhere in sight. I aimed to initiate an action for this occurrence in my country which will amplify the voices of citizens and will also carry them to the policymakers for climate justice.

Then, the idea of a petition came to me, which embodies the democratic concept of carrying, conveying and centering the voices of citizens to the authority in written form.

Ideally, it converts people’s signatories to the force of democracy to have their demands be heard by the authority hence, our policymakers realize what we, the citizens want. Indeed, science and democracy are interlinked, as Greta Thunberg wisely said.

I knew that some might call me too young to initiate this as I am the youngest person yet to launch something like this in Bangladesh. But I strongly believe, as Greta Thunberg says, we are never too small to make a difference.

Our parliament (Jatiya Sangsad) commendably made Bangladesh the first country in the world to adopt a Planetary Emergency Declaration on November 13, 2019. It was indeed a major initiative worthy of being applauded for but alone the declaration is not enough to face the catastrophe that has risen. I felt we could do a better job in implementing this declaration. We should rapidly execute a real, target-oriented and sustainable roadmap to transform this declaration into action. It seemed essential to me for implementation.

So, I titled the petition “Petition to implement the Bangladesh Planetary Emergency Declaration and incorporate climate education in school curriculum.” This petition has a target to collect 10,000 signatures from all around the world within September 24, 2021, the day of Fridays for Future Global Day of Climate Strike “Uproot the System”.

The petition has collected more than 2000 signatures till now. Prominent citizens of our country such as, Prof Saleemul Huq, Prof Ainun Nishat, Prof Anu Muhammad, Advocate Syeda Rizwana Hasan, Farah Kabir, Sadat Rahman have also added their prestigious signatures in support of this petition.

The petition mainly urges the authority to emphasize issues like Fossil Fuels, Plastic pollution and public transportation in the roadmap.

Firstly, we need a quick transition from all fossil fuels; coal, oil and natural gas-based energy to clean, green renewable

energy, which is also closely aligned with the recent Green New Deal demands. Continuing to use fossil fuels as energy sources will result in Greenhouse gas emissions to heighten and soot particles to pollute our air and water. It will also destroy natural habitats and wildlife species hence, becoming an obstacle for environmental and natural conservation.

Then the rapid establishment of recycling systems for plastic wastes currently has become a crucial task for our government to make a real priority. Without this, local adaptation will be quite difficult as improper plastic trash management is causing water and air deterioration, health hazards, water logging, soil infertility and harming aquatic beings, fuelling the climate crisis additionally.

Finally, detailed climate and environmental education in our school curriculum and appropriate training for teachers to teach about climate and environment regularly, creatively, and engagingly in the classrooms is also another important clause of the petition.

To tackle the climate crisis, the changes required are

“Today when I am writing this article, I am a 15-year-old schoolgirl. I have always found myself incredibly concerned and passionate about climate justice as I have my entire future on the frontlines of this crisis”

broad and deep at every level of society requiring elaborate knowledge and awareness from the grassroots. An ignorant and uninformed society is more likely to act unwisely. We, young people, must need to have the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes we require to build a clean, safe, green, low emission and climate-resilient future.

From my learning, I think there is nothing more powerful in the world than young people becoming a hope for themselves and the planet. Real hope comes from our concrete actions. No one is too small to make a difference, nor are our steps.

Aruba Faruque is a 9th grade student at Rangamati Govt. Girl's High School, Rangamati and a young climate and environmental activist. She is the youngest-yet petitioner of Bangladesh. She can be reached at aruba.faruque@yahoo.com.

FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE

BANGLADESHI YOUTH WILL HOLD ACCOUNTABLE THE GOVERNMENTS AND BUSINESSES FOR ENSURING CLIMATE JUSTICE AT COP26

YOUTH FIGHTS FOR PROTECTING THE FUTURE AND THE PRESENT



FRIDAYS FOR FUTURE - BANGLADESH

Sohanur Rahman

We are in a global climate emergency situation with huge adverse impacts on our planet and people. Developing countries like Bangladesh have the least contribution to the current climate catastrophe but pay the highest level of cost of loss and damage each year. We, young people are dealing

with major extreme events, which are depriving us of essential basic social service provisions. The sense of protection is endangered in the future as well as the present too.

As a coastal resident myself, I witnessed many tropical cyclones from my childhood. It had been a very terrifying experience, realizing how many people have lost their houses in my very own community due to climate-induced natural

disasters. After witnessing several extreme events, I had recognized how vulnerable coastal people in Bangladesh really are.

To make a difference and to help the people in coastal Bangladesh, I got involved in climate activism. A few years back I had traveled to Andar Char (island) of Patuakhali district for documentary purposes. It was an eye-opening visit for me, the island is incredibly at risk of climate-linked disasters where eight thousand residents have access to just one cyclone shelter and no high school.

Observing the human suffering on the grounds, I was determined to do something more that ensured climate justice for the vulnerable people. I wanted my work to amplify the unheard voices of these communities. So, I initiated a youth network called YouthNet for Climate Justice,

“Currently we have mobilized over 1,500 volunteers across Bangladesh. This nationwide network is also providing capacity development training to local youth”

which implemented different action plans for community mobilization, campaigns, advocacy works.

Currently we have mobilized over 1,500 volunteers across Bangladesh. This nationwide network is also providing capacity development training to local youth. Moreover, on last year's International Youth Day we hosted a coastal youth action hub with the aim to promote youth movement building and policy advocacy.

Involvement with Fridays for Future Movement

Fridays for Future (FFF) is a global youth-led climate strike movement started in August 2018 led by Swedish teenager Greta Thunberg. The aim of the movement is to place moral pressure on global leaders, to concentrate on the scientists, then to wish urgent action to limiting global warming.

I also involved myself in the FFF movement through some international young friends on Facebook who were also involved in Greta's movement. We followed their involvement with climate strikes, then offered to fight together.

Following in the footsteps of Greta, we started climate strikes with the lens of climate justice and urged the national and world leaders to act against global climate change with urgent action. We've faced many ignorance and systemic barriers but tackled these challenges through advocacy and positive engagement with the policymakers.

Considering our demands, Bangladesh Parliament has taken the first-ever motion on the point of global climate change as Planetary Emergency and this year the government has declared the Mujib Climate Prosperity plan to decarbonize the economy.

Moreover, as per to news online the government announced recently that Bangladesh is going to cancel 10 coal-based projects as they revise the country's power system master plan (UNB, 2021).

Greta Thunberg appreciated our initiative of FFF Bangladesh and all climate activists who were behind to cancel 10 coal-fired power plant projects within the country. Currently, we are working closely with Parliamentarians to develop a roadmap and Youth Vision Document to achieve climate justice.

However, we also changed the word 'global south' and adopted a term called MAPA: Most Affected People and Area, to make the communities that suffer the most from the impacts of the climate crisis more visible.

Recognizing this term, FFF is getting ready to host a subsequent global climate strike #UprootTheSystem on September 24, 2021. It's time to break the global system within the era of loss and damage from human-induced climate crises and Bangladeshi youth will keep pushing through the challenge to hold accountable the governments and businesses with concrete actions for ensuring climate justice at COP26.

Focusing on the COP26 UN Summit, we are going to develop a vision document by organizing a series of youth consultations. After finalizing this document, we will share this agenda with our policymakers and then it will be presented at Youth Summit-COP26 in Milan. This vision document will reflect our demands and climate pledge. ■

Sohanur Rahman is Founding Member of the Fridays for Future Bangladesh and Coordinator of the YouthNet for Climate Justice.

WASH INTERVENTION

RANGPUR'S YOUTH WORKING TO MAKE A DIFFERENCE IN WASH INTERVENTIONS IMPACTED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

AFFORDABLE AND SUSTAINABLE ACCESS TO CLEAN WATER AND WELL-CONSTRUCTED SANITATION SYSTEM IS A HUMAN RIGHT



PIXABAY

Most Mastura Munia Farjana, Sumaiya Afroj, and Md Abu Hasnat

Bangladesh has been struggling with ensuring access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene for its people. The country has made significant progress towards providing everyone with water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) service over the last two decades.

Around 47% of the population now has access to safely

managed drinking water (MICS, 2019). Only 45.3% of households have access to sanitary toilets with a water seal (BBS, 2019) and 35% of the population has basic handwashing facilities at home (Unicef, WHO 2018).

While ensuring availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all has been a challenge, poor health and hygiene has been experienced across many communities in the country, especially in several areas of Rangpur and its nearby region. Scarcity of clean water results

in several waterborne diseases and public health issues. Climate change, the fickleness of weather patterns, extreme weather events, and several natural disasters has intensified this threat beyond a shadow of a doubt.

In the monsoon period (June to mid-October) almost every year floods occur. The level of floodwater submerges the sewage system and breaks it down which result in water contamination and this contaminated water consumption turns into an acute health risk for community people. Unavailability of water during drought season compelled people to intake less safe water that not only has an adverse impact on their health but also enhances the probability of other health risks.

“The level of floodwater submerges the sewage system and breaks it down which result in water contamination and this contaminated water consumption turns into an acute health risk for community people”

With few arrangements to fight against this sensitive issue, the people living in Rangpur are suffering from safe water scarcity. In order to ensure a climate-resilient water and sanitation system, the health of community people and youth activists of the Rangpur has been stepping up and is playing a key role in recent times. We are working on this WASH (water, sanitation, and hygiene) issue in our community from where our efforts bring changes.

Drought is a common climatic hazard here in Rangpur and usually occurs here two times: March-May and October-November. People face water shortages when drought occurs. Drought usually reduces crop production, creating water shortages. Besides drought, groundwater depletion seems another climate-driven issue, especially in city corporation areas. Both drought and groundwater depletion causes clean water scarcity.

From the Climate Resilience Collective, a Bay of Bengal Pilot being implemented by Youth Climate Lab based in Canada and ICCAD we have been able to understand the scenario of water accessibility of people, poor sanitation and sewage system. Via door to door surveys, focus group discussions with people, key informant interviews we have been able to understand how people are suffering from the clean water and sanitation crisis.

All the activities were conducted in the month of February-March of this year to make people aware of their rights of having clean water, a proper sanitation system and maintaining hygiene; what can be a probable solution to cope up with all the issues and introduce them with facts that can bring change positively. Affordable and sustainable access to clean water, well-constructed sanitation system is a human right. Knowledge and ideas which have been shared with all community people especially those illiterate and poor people can bring a difference.

In the Rangpur city corporation area, most of the people here are not privileged to have a good sanitation system and water supply. As part of making people more aware about water, sanitation health, several activities were conducted. As a youth advocacy group, our discussion focused on safe drinking water, waterborne disease, water security and the importance of water.

We have visited approximately 200 houses (Ashrotpur, Chak Bazar area which is under City Corporation ward no- 28) to understand their situation and to advocate for them about WASH. This ward is situated very close to Shyma Sundori Khal where water is already polluted. Each year, floodwater and polluted water of this Khal raise a safe water crisis.

We suggested to them how they can solve their water issues, how they should maintain hygiene, what can be done from their perspective and how to cope up with that problem. What we understood from our conversation is that most of the people in these households lack access to water; some of them used water from their neighbourhood.

Additionally, it was interesting to learn that many people were not much concerned about water security. While the case of water seemed bleak, many of these households had a sanitary toilet. With several NGOs and city corporations providing them financial help to construct sanitary toilets and active advocacy of water, hygiene has made them aware of improving their sanitation.

Though many of the houses have some level of sanitary toilet improvements, the WASH problem is comparatively higher in slum areas near Shyma Sundori khal where existing water is highly polluted. In the rainy season each year, people's difficulties with WASH increases. On talking to school-going teenage girls it was an informative discussion because they were willing to listen and learn from us. On the other hand, older people in their family shared their bitter experiences of not having clean water, poor sanitary systems and lack of health support.

Another project we have engaged in was a collaboration project of WaterAid and JAAGO Foundation. The name of the project is "YES Clean water". Arsenic, PH value of water and TDS (Total Dissolved Solid) had been tested under the initiative. 40 young volunteers across Rangpur worked on the project.

Under this project, we surveyed 1200 houses in the 4 wards at city corporation area. During the survey, we had to go to different houses and talk to them about water quality, we found that they are quite aware of the arsenic problem. When arsenic was found in several homes, they said they stored drinking water elsewhere. On the other hand, in some areas, we observed excess iron.

Talking to the people there, we got to understand that they perceive that there is no health risk for their water. To them, it has now become a habit. In total, we got good drinking water quality in 900 homes. Most of the remaining 300 homes had iron problems. Due to the presence of iron in the water, we did not get the correct PH value in many homes. Iron problems are also a big health risk.

Dr Abdullah Kafi, a specialist at Dhaka Medical College Hospital, said, "*Drinking more than the tolerable amount of iron-rich water can lead to bone infections and severe damage to various organs of the human body, including liver cirrhosis.*" Iron accumulates in different parts of the body and causes wounds. The damage to the human body is gradual, so it is not immediately apparent. ' The young people who volunteered for this project got aware about the water problem; We have learned basic water security. Water resources, water services, water-related risks all depend on how well water is managed.

Currently, with the Climate Resilience Collective project, we are initiating individual local projects to take our learnings from our past experience to understand the scenario of water accessibility of people, poor sanitation and sewage system.

Most the activities we have conducted under our local projects have been focused to make people aware of their

“ Though many of the houses have some level of sanitary toilet improvements, the WASH problem is comparatively higher in slum areas near Shyma Sundori khal where existing water is highly polluted ”

rights of having clean water, a proper sanitation system and maintaining hygiene; what can be a probable solution to cope up with all the issues and introduce themselves with facts that can bring change positively.

Affordable and sustainable access to clean water and well-constructed sanitation system is a human right. With the aim to make a difference in the communities living in the Rangpur City Corporation, we take it as our responsibility as active youth members of the society to make an effort to bring change. ■

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HOW DOES PERCEPTION REFLECT THROUGH OUR ACTIONS IN RELATION TO CLIMATE CHANGE ACTION?

PEOPLE WHO ARE HEAVILY DEPENDENT ON NATURE, GREW UP WITH NATURE-FRIENDLY PERCEPTIONS FROM ANCIENT TIMES



PIXABAY

Sakib Rahman Siddique Shuvo

Amid the nineteenth century, human philosophy faced a tremendous shifting towards nature. While the ancient people believed that nature is the ultimate power on the earth, the nineteenth century ushered in the idea that humans can control nature and modify it with the development of science and technology.

In the late sixties, this faced a paradigm shift towards giving nature the same priority as human interference, creating urgency for nature conservation. Later, we learned about climate change, which directly relates to thinking human beings are superior to nature. Then the idea of sustainable and eco-friendly approaches towards development and lifestyle became mainstream.

However, perception gives meaning to the environment around us – the process that involves seeing, receiving, selecting, organizing, and interpreting. Perception is our brain's ultimate result after analyzing our sensory reports acquired by our physical organs. Perceptions also have influences like past experiences, assumptions and expectations, character traits, education, culture, preconceived notions, etc.

People who are heavily dependent on nature grew up with nature-friendly perceptions from ancient times. Indigenous people have extra care for nature; their culture and daily life activities are not harmful to the environment. For example - in rural Bangladesh, ponds are used as drinking water and other water-related amenities. The people directly involved with the pond take advantage of the pond and have extra care.

Again, people dependent on forests also adopt a friendly culture towards the woods – they regulate their consumption of forest products in a manner that can be used for a long time. Sometimes their culture prioritizes the forest area as a holy or sacred place. In Sub-Saharan Africa, tribes have age-old techniques of conserving their natural resources. These people's perception tells them to care about the natural resources because they are heavily dependent on those.

“Sound understanding of nature's importance influences better care towards it”

Nevertheless, perception is biased towards most favourite or essential things around. Sound understanding of nature's importance influences better care towards it – motivates us to think in an approach to save it and sustain it – which is a dire necessity in this age of exploitation and degradation. Again, climate change is our biggest threat, leading us towards an inhabitable earth and complete extinction. The impacts of climate change have already started to be visible in front of us; the sea level is rising, cyclones are fiercer, and summers are hotter. It became more than a necessity to fight against climate change. Growing a perception of nature can motivate us and bring a positive change in this threatening situation.

However, promoting nature-friendly thinking in every aspect of life is now well practised in various practitioner level initiatives. Nature-based Solutions or NbS is one of the newest concepts which promotes sustainable use of nature

and tackling the challenges. NbS promotes inclusive and equitable initiatives and derived from nature and cultures around it, which will directly influence people's minds and thought processes.

Nevertheless, the youth community's spirit and curiosity towards new things make the youths adopt new perceptions or modify them. People start to grow their perceptions at the very early stage of their lives - from family. Then academic institutions and friends also start to influence them. Finally, from the early teenage years, people begin to gain social influence from society. Growing care for nature also commences in this way.

There are a handful of examples of youth-led initiatives which created massive changes around the world. The international community acknowledges Swedish activist Greta Thunberg and her endeavours for climate change activism.

In the African region, various projects empowered youth groups and got positive results. Environmental clubs around the universities around the world are also doing wondrous works. All of this influences others who are not members or attached to the venture to grow care and positively perceive nature conservation. Suppose more support and guidelines are provided to them. In that case, they can make a significant difference and influence their friends and family, creating the whole society to positively perceive nature conservation.

Additionally, in Bangladesh, the national curriculum prioritizes nature's study, but it is crucial to have practical experiences, especially for urban-centric youths. The practice of social and environmental clubs should be initiated at an early age in primary level education. Relatively older youths who actively participate in club activities (college or university going students) should give away their knowledge to the children and teenagers at the very early stage of developing their perception.

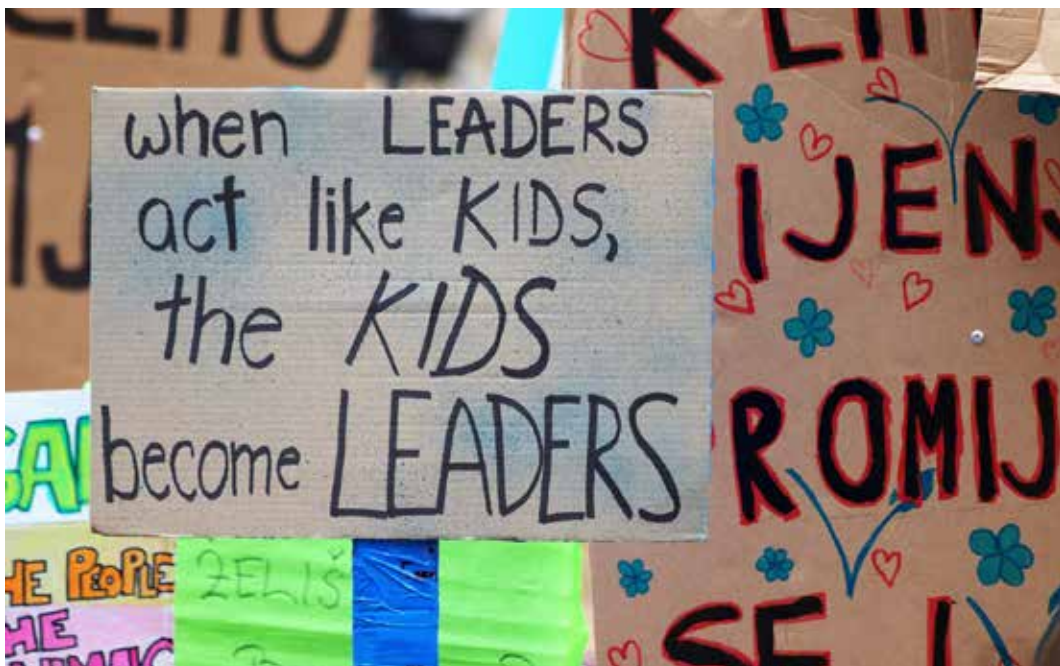
Finally, perception of the environment and ecosystem is the key to using natural resources and conserving them. It influences our daily life micro-level decisions we take every day and the significant decisions towards society.

Climate change is no longer a future problem; we have to act now and fight against it. It is hard to bring all human beings into this change-making scenario. Still, it is easy to influence their perception of nature by slowly affecting our daily life behaviour and decisions. As author Paula Heller Garland says, “Change doesn't happen all at once. It's a gradual wearing away of the unconsciousness.” Changes in the perceptions are more sustaining and practical, making a concrete base for the future. ■

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LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE, REFLECTION FROM RISE YOUTH PROGRAM

BEING AN ENVIRONMENTAL SCIENCES GRADUATE, I ALREADY HAD THEORETICAL KNOWLEDGE OF CLIMATE CHANGE, BUT THIS PROGRAM PROVIDED HANDS-ON PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCES



PIXABAY

Maliha Momotaj Himu

RISE (Rethink and Innovate for a Sustainable Environment) is a climate change and project management-focused Youth Mentorship Program. This program aims to educate current university students the fundamentals of project management in the context of climate change.

This initiative is part of the Climate Finance Transparency Mechanism (CFTM) project of the British Council Bangladesh's PROKAS program. Through this initiative, the students learned about the fundamentals of climate change, how to incorporate various socioeconomic factors into it, and how youth may participate in climate change action. As one of the PROKAS initiative's partner organizations, the International Centre for Climate Change

and Development (ICCCAD) hosts this mentoring program at the Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB).

I was part of the RISE-1 youth Leadership Program. I first heard about this program when I was a final year student of my bachelor's degree. Initially, I felt interested in the program because it emphasized climate change, but later on, I realized it was much more than that when I got selected for the program. Our first physical appearance was an inception workshop where we met the program's authority and the candidates and learned more about the program. The most exciting part of the inception workshop was the candidates from diverse academic backgrounds and how multidisciplinary backgrounds can work together to fight climate change and a better sustainable future.

After getting selected from this inception workshop through some assignments, 20 university students with diverse backgrounds came together, and our RISE journey started. This journey began with a three-day residential workshop at Nakshatrabari Resort, Gazipur. Multiple sessions were held on how climate change happens, developing and managing a project, storytelling through photography, and many more activities.

During this workshop, we were given several assignments where we worked as a group, and each group was formed with students of different backgrounds. This set up of forming groups helped me to realize how people from different backgrounds can develop solutions to fight climate change and how knowledge from multidisciplinary experiences is necessary during project development.

For example, as an assignment, we were supposed to make a project plan and in my group there were students from Geography, Environmental Sciences, Economics and Business Administration. We worked together to develop a project plan and during that, we shared our different academic perspectives and contributed and realized how interdisciplinary effort could bring out the best solutions. This residential workshop also allowed making new friends, to learn more about climate change and project management from professionals.

“ I felt interested in the program because it emphasized climate change, but later on, I realized it was much more than that ”

In this program, we also had a four-day field visit in Shyamnagar, Satkhira; one of Bangladesh's most climate-vulnerable coastal areas. During this visit, we got the opportunity to meet local volunteers, youth reporters, female village police, and a local NGO working with women.

We also had a chance to visit two remote villages (Gabura and Datinakhali), which frequently get affected by cyclones. We talked with the people about their miseries during natural disasters. These young volunteers communicate with the local people to disseminate weather updates during cyclones, help them go to shelters, distribute food, medicine and necessary relief products. After knowing about their real-life work experiences, I realized how wonderfully they are doing their jobs despite having several difficulties and learned more

about youth power and the magnitude of difference that can be created if young people of a community work together.

The program also allowed conducting a focus group discussion with the local women about their experiences during cyclone Aila and Fani and the difficulties they face in terms of gender perspective. The focus group discussion reflected the social inequalities and burdens faced by the women and how it increases, especially during natural disasters.

We also meet the Chairman of Burigowalini Union and Mayor of Satkhira Pourashava, who shared about several schemes which were running by the government to facilitate the local people with fresh drinking water and dams also shared their view on some future development projects which will change the socio-economic scenario of the locality.

Being an Environmental Sciences graduate, I already had theoretical knowledge of climate change, but this program provided hands-on practical knowledge and experiences. Not only that, but this program also offered a platform to talk in front of local people, to communicate with the social leaders and public representatives, to discuss ideas with experts and learn from the professionals.

The opportunity to work with students of multidisciplinary backgrounds broadened my outlook and boosted my confidence to work as a team player. Working as a team, my leadership skills have been enhanced and gave me a great prospect of networking. Also, this program provided several learning opportunities from grass-root level young volunteers to professionals and experts of different fields.

The achievements from this leadership and capacity-building program are currently helping me in my professional life in a lot more ways. This leadership program capacitated me to plan projects, incorporate socioeconomic factors into a project, conduct a focus group discussion, run a field visit and which social and cultural factors should be taken into account during data collection in a field visit.

Currently, I am working as Junior Program Officer at ICCCAD with the youth team. In the future, I want to work with indigenous youth and explore more about their knowledge of climate change and the obstacles they face in their localities in terms of climate change impacts. I also want to explore our national policies and how youth has been addressed in those.

RISE program has been an excellent platform for young university students interested in learning and working on climate change-related fields. It has been a great networking opportunity to engage with other youths of diverse multidisciplinary field who are eager to enhance their knowledge on climate change and its impacts. ■

Maliha Momotaj Himu is working in International Centre for Climate Change and Development as a Junior Program Officer, her research interest lies in Locally Led Adaptation, Youth in Climate Change. Can be reached at maliha.himu@icccad.org.