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PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

■ **BANGLADESH WRITES THE HISTORY OF ADAPTATION**

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**How is Bangladesh writing the
history of adaptation?**

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The new normal: Youth leadership for climate action

HARNESSING THE POWER OF YOUTH



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Farah Kabir

In recent years, the world has faced the global challenge of a health crisis; a long series of natural disasters, and extreme climatic events shaking our social, economic, political systems to their core.

While the climate crisis is unravelling, individuals and communities who are socially, structurally, and systemically marginalised are being disproportionately affected. As climate change will continue to intensify the challenges, children and young people, especially those at the frontlines are foreseen to suffer grave consequences.

However, young people across the world are initiating their own movements -- raising their voices, needs, and commitment for a better future. Yet, it is questionable how those needs and demands are reflected in global and national policies and negotiations, particularly when it comes to the implementation

of the policies. Therefore, it is high time that our collective actions uphold climate justice for future generations.

At ActionAid Bangladesh, we are committed to delivering and catalysing youth-led social change. Since 2008, we have been working to empower women and youth across Bangladesh to take climate action. We start nurturing children from the early childhood development phase through “Sishu Bikash Kendro” and continue building their capacities as they mature and become young advocates.

“Youth Activism” is one of the core areas in which ActionAid has been investing over the last few years. Youth activism has been harnessed at the national, international, and community levels, therefore. We established *Activista* -- a global youth network in more than 25 countries involving more than 250 ActionAid partners and thousands of volunteers who are working on various issues including climate justice.

On the International Youth Day 2020 (12 August 2020), ActionAid Bangladesh, together with a group of youth-led grassroots organisations, launched “Coastal Youth Action Hub” (CYAH) -- a platform for young people from the coastal district to learn and share information, knowledge and take cumulative action to environmental and climate challenges.

In 2018, children from different working locations of ActionAid took part in the climate justice movement by writing open letters on how climatic events had taken away their homes and dreams. In 2019, youth platforms in Bangladesh mobilised over 20,000 young people in 17 districts to join the global climate justice campaign.

Despite the COVID-19 lockdown, the movement continued to expand in 2020 and 2021. In 2021, along with 13 other countries, ActionAid Bangladesh participated in the Youth-led Digital Engagement (YDE) using a digital platform to facilitate youth mobilisation on youth and gender-responsive public service, climate action, and decent work and economic empowerment. The project capacitated and mobilised marginalised young people of Barguna, Kurigram, Rajshahi, and Satkhira. As a result, 80,36,189 young people were reached (using digital platforms).

To show global solidarity and commemorate global youth actions, ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB) both supports and joins the youth-led movements “Fridays for Future” and other global climate strikes. AAB was especially involved before COY (Conference of Youth) and COP (Conference of the Parties) in 2021.

To facilitate and grow feminist leadership, we are working with young women to lead emergency response in rebuilding the embankments damaged by Cyclone Yaas in May 2021 with the intent to ensure safe drinking water in the coastal areas. Additionally, every Friday, we support the coastal women-led climate movement.

“Campaigns” are also a big part of the interventions at AAB. In October 2021, AAB took part in the Global Earth Walk Campaign and by covering 1200 km through walking, cycling, and swimming became the highest contributor to the Global Earth Walk Campaign within the ActionAid Federation. Around 3000 people from all around Bangladesh expressed solidarity with the campaign held during 15-31 October 2021, demanding that world leaders need to “Step Up for Climate Justice”.

Through the implementation of the Global Youth-led Climate Campaign (GYCC) project, we have mobilised 4,31,419 young people from a total of six districts. They expressed their solidarity with the global movement in demand of climate and economic justice. At the policy level, the campaign focused on the inclusion of youth voices in the National Adaptation Plan (NAP).

In February and March 2021, ActionAid worked in partnership with the “Space for Art Foundation” on a global art project. The objective of the project was to bring together young people’s voices from around the world on climate

change issues for a Safe Earth. A total of 1,033 children from 15 of the AAB working areas took part in the competition. Few of the artwork of the Sponsor Children were selected to represent Bangladesh at the COP26, in their exhibition.

ActionAid Bangladesh provides the space for young people to learn, act, and share with the intent to take up advocacy and lobbying. We regularly take part and organise youth parliament, policy debate, and dialogues to provide young people the floor to share their views and thoughts. Recently we organised an online consultation on “Climate Justice: Capturing the Youth Voice from Global South”. Young

“However, young people across the world are initiating their own movements”

people from 30 countries of the Global South took part in the event. We reached 23,632 youth through this consultation. Furthermore, in 2021 we produced two animated videos on the theme of youth-led localised climate solutions and climate finance. In the same year, we organised three dialogues focused on youth, coastal challenges, and food systems transformation. We have conducted four divisional consultations with youth on Climate Change.

ActionAid Bangladesh believes in supporting young people and creating opportunities for them as they will be instrumental in dealing with the planetary emergency and global challenges like climate change. We will continue to address injustices within our communities and promote social cohesion and inclusion for all, as here at ActionAid we believe in the “Power in People”. ■

Farah Kabir is the Country Director of ActionAid Bangladesh. She is the chair of the Global Board of the Global Network of Disaster Risk Reduction (GNDR) since 2015 and is currently an elected Board Member of Climate Action Network South Asia (CANSA).



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Gender equality and climate justice

FEMINIST ACTION FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE IS CRUCIAL

Dilruba Haider

We have come a long way from questioning “why gender in climate change actions.” To quickly recapitulate the criticality of gender in climate actions: Vulnerability and capacity with regards to disaster and climate change impacts are related to power and privileges.

Women and marginalized groups are at the bottom of the power structure and have the least power, privileges, and resources; and therefore much less capacity to mitigate risks and shocks. Due to their socio-economic and

cultural differences, women, men, girls, boys, and gender diverse groups experience risks and shocks differently; for example, violence, early marriage, and lack of reproductive health care during and after disasters are risks for female groups; while during disasters, people with diverse sexual orientation are barred from entering shelters.

Climate change affects different geographical areas and communities differently. As the poorest countries and the most vulnerable people within those countries like women, girls, and gender diverse groups suffer the most, while they have been contributing the least to the climate crisis, climate justice is becoming a clarion call of developing countries. Simply saying climate justice means the poorest countries, and people should be supported by those who have contributed most to climate change.

Climate justice and gender equity are inextricably linked. Climate justice focuses on the needs of the most marginalized groups who rely on natural resources for their lives and livelihoods. Women, girls, and gender diverse groups fall into that category, so focusing climate actions on and with these groups is a critical aspect of climate justice.

The scientific projections of an increase in average global temperatures, even if global emission targets are met, mean that the environment (ecosystems and the way people interact with them) will face permanent changes. Agro-economy based women and men increasingly face the challenges of having to adapt their production systems in the context of climate change and natural resource depletion.

It's constantly changing, what (crops and forests) grows where, which livestock and fish will be viable, sea level rise and ocean acidification, whether water supplies can be sustained, vector borne diseases such as malarial, dengue, and plant pests moving into newly-warmer regions. These would have a slower impact than the extreme weather events, and require long term adaptation responses. Without analyzing the gender elements of these climate change impacts, and without participation and leadership of women, adaptation efforts for these slow impacts run the risk of being inadequate.

It's quite evident that women and girls are underrepresented in advancing climate actions across all levels and sectors, from national to community level planning, in the public sector, climate finance, or clean energy. The Conference of Parties (COP) annual report on women's engagement in progress towards meeting the goal of gender balance in advancing gender-sensitive climate policy has been showing an erratic trend, but mostly siding in terms of women's membership in various constituted bodies of the UNFCCC.

The Action Coalitions of Generation Equality forum was launched in 2021, bringing together all stakeholders

“Women and marginalized groups are at the bottom of the power structure and have the least power, privileges, and resources; and therefore much less capacity to mitigate risks and shocks”

for collective actions in six thematic areas for accelerating gender equality and women's rights across the developmental spectrum. The Feminist Action for Climate Justice is one of those, which unequivocally declares that “environmental sustainability is inextricably linked to social justice and gender equality.” The Feminist Action for Climate Justice proposes four specific Actions to be attained by 2026:

Increase Direct Action to financing for gender just climate solutions, especially for women and girls at grass root level; 88% of all climate investments to be geared towards that;

Enable women and girls to lead a just transition to an inclusive, circular, and regenerative, green economy.

“Women have inherent capacity and resilience that sustain their families and communities”

Women’s agencies, particularly women’s organizations, engagement in this respect is crucial;

Build the resilience of women and girls to climate impacts, disaster risks, loss and damage, including through land right and tenure security. Women’s economic empowerment is indeed critical for their resilience;

Increase the collection and use of data on the gender environment nexus; at least 20 countries by 2026 to achieve the target.

In Bangladesh, there has been some advancement in addressing women’s issues at climate change policies and plans. The draft Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCPP), a prospective plan until 2030, is a people centric economic development plan against the climate change impacts that the country is enduring already. Of the four broad-head actions in the plan, two commit to be gender responsive, one on “growth,” the other on “employment and green economy”

In the area of disaggregated data, Bangladesh has been progressing well. With UN Women’s support, the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics has been working on preparing tools and collecting sex, age, disability disaggregated data for environment, disaster, and climate change.

UN Women has recently conducted a study on gender and climate change policies which shows that Bangladesh has strong stand-alone policies separately in climate change and gender equality. There was an attempt to mainstream gender through the Climate Change & Gender Action Plan (ccGAP, 2013), but there is no evidence of uptake of the plan by the governments or other stakeholders.

Currently, the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change is updating the ccGAP, with support from UN Women, hoping to turn the plan into action. Significant challenges were limited capacity to mainstream gender

into policies and actions, lack of investment in gender-responsive adaptation actions, and very limited access to women’s organizations and women in decision-making.

The adaptation policies and plans acknowledge the role of gender, but mitigation discourse seldom refers to gender aspects. Critical sectors for climate change adaptation like agriculture, water resources, or forestry policies and strategies do not pay heed to gender equality. Lack of monitoring mechanism or evaluation framework and indicators only perpetuates gender insensitivity of the climate change adaptation and mitigation actions.

At the community level, women have not been deterred, however, by the lack of gender-responsive adaptation policies or actions. They have been living, fighting and adapting to the grim climatic impacts on their own; be it in unusual floods carrying out their chores on raised platforms in their houses, or raising poultry and goats or plant vegetable in raised patches of land within their homesteads, or adopting low-cost drip irrigation methods for their kitchen garden to save precious water in salinity stricken coastal areas. Women have inherent capacity and resilience that sustain their families and communities.

Gender equality strengthens our collective capacity to tackle the climate crisis. Feminist action for climate justice is therefore crucial, and advocating for women and girls’ rights should be central to our climate actions.

Disclaimer: The content and opinions expressed in this article are that of the author herself, not of UN Women. ■

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Dignity in the shadows: Let's talk about it

DIGNITY SURROUNDING VULNERABILITY TO NATURAL RESOURCES IS OFTEN LEFT IN THE SHADOWS IN GENDER-CLIMATE BASED DISCOURSE



COURTESY

Adnan Qader and Hasin Jahan

Note to the reader: We often forget to talk about dignity surrounding natural resources when we talk about gender rights. Adnan came to know about the term shadow racism when he was studying in Canada. Shadow racism is an indirect method of social stigmatization based on your name, religion, presumptions, etc, often not talked about to an extent where he could freely discuss it with his friends or family. Similarly, dignity surrounding vulnerability to natural resources is often left in the shadows in gender-climate based discourse. Dignity can be classed into four kinds -- dignity of merit, moral stature, identity, and dignity as a human.

When Rani Das -- then, a newly married 19-year old -- moved to Dacope, an upazila of Khulna district on the southwest coast of Bangladesh, she didn't comprehend just how much the scarcity of drinking water in the region would affect her. Now 26 years old, Rani has been suffering for seven years and was pregnant with her second child when we conducted the interview. She found the shortage of water troubling every aspect of her daily life.

Rani Das is a climate-induced migrant. Her father was a struggling homemaker with dire economic conditions. She got married because of financial constraints in her family, and moved from her village in neighbouring Satkhira district, looking for better livelihood opportunities.

The southwest of Bangladesh, situated near the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forests in the world, faces the brunt of the ongoing climate crisis. A combination of tidal flooding, cyclonic storms, storm surges, and saltwater intrusions has led to salinity in the groundwater and freshwater ponds. As a result, the region suffers from potable water -- it is scarce, and a luxury.

“When I turned 19, I got married and moved to Bajua, Dacope, with my husband. My husband and I were looking for better living opportunities. At my home village in Satkhira, I had suffered greatly, like any other girl of my locality. My father struggled to earn a living. Most girls I knew or were my friends got married at my age at that time.”

Most girls are married off or are forced to marry by the age of 12 to 15 in our region. Many of Rani’s friends were married by the time they had turned 15. Rani was one of the lucky ones. She felt somewhat worthy compared to the others.

“The village I moved from is very salty. The salinity of the water is increasing every season. We were forced to drink arsenic-contaminated water from the tubewell, which was the only source of drinking water in our locality.”

The struggle of fetching clean water was a constant burden to her family, and it makes you wonder what the conditions of their sanitation would have been. Like most people in her village, the latrine her father had built was made crudely with some tin shed superstructure and with a slab on a pit, which hardly withstood any rough weather conditions. Built near a pond and situated far from her place, the latrine was a source of disease, especially during the rainy season. However, what troubled her the most was the time it got dark.

Let’s close our eyes for a second. Turn off your lights. Imagine being a kid. We used to run to the washroom thinking the boogeyman would get us. Although most of our readers and I grew up in the city, the idea of running to the toilet seemed terrifying to us. Can you imagine yourself in Rani’s shoes?

“My father had built our toilet when I was around 15, but I could hardly use it at night. Only sometimes, when there was an emergency, I would call my mother or father to accompany me. They were my protection. Sometimes I had to walk alone at night. It was an impossible task for me during the rainy season. My mother kept a pot beside my bed to use instead of taking me outside in the dark. It was embarrassing.”

Like most women in the coastal belt, Rani also faced gender-based discrimination related to inadequate WASH services in a climate change-prone area. Globally, in 71% of households, the responsibility for the daily task of water collection goes to women and girls. As a result of time spent on water collection, many women and girls cannot attend school, take on income-earning opportunities, carry out leisure activities, or engage in decision-making.

“The number of cyclones and storms that hit us is increasing. We are not prepared for it. When I got married and

“ Built near a pond and situated far from her place, the latrine was a source of disease, especially during the rainy season ”

moved to Dacope, we thought it would ease our burden. But this is the same here. We do not have a safe drinking water source.”

What Rani and her family faced was a case of double jeopardy. She had moved to look for better life opportunities and tried to rebuild her life in a new place. Unfortunately, she faced the same problem in her new location, knowingly and unknowingly -- a dilemma most climate-induced migrants face.

“I must bring water from a far distance, and we have to buy water. Every month we spend Tk200 on water. We use this water only for cooking and drinking. Two buckets of water for a four-member family do not last long.”

Rani was emotional and embarrassed while talking about the cost of the water. These scenarios are quite common in coastal Bangladesh. Rani drinks as little water as possible, which is difficult during pregnancy. To make the matter



COURTESY

worse for her, the toilet her husband had built was destroyed by one of the recent cyclones. They use a crudely made toilet with minimal coverage, because they can't afford better.

"The toilet we have now is broken, and I feel shy to use it during the daytime. Every time I use it, I need to cover the broken parts of the fence with a cloth to hide. I do not use the toilet at night at all. But due to pregnancy, I have to, and then I need to wake up my mother-in-law to go with me outdoors in the yard, or sometimes I go behind the woods."

Access to clean water is not just important for their dignity, but equally important for women and adolescent girls facing their periods. It is part of their human dignity. Most women in rural communities still depend on rags, since pads are often unavailable during floods or disasters, and they cannot even use them generally because of the cost issue.

After cyclone Amphan in 2020, the water crisis was severe. Rani's family was sick for many days. She often feared for

her 5-year-old daughter, and worried about her then-unborn child. She doesn't want them to suffer a similar fate.

It would be a misnomer to paint all women as sufferers. Some have fought to change the narrative about their dignity. Like Rani Das, another young lady Gita Roy came to the village named Tengrakhali from Assasuni Upazilla, Satkhira, with her husband, looking for better life opportunities. Women in her village are taught to keep their heads down, and have strong social and family bindings, which often restrict them from speaking out.

However, Gita wanted to change this reality. She was outspoken and dedicated to changing the narrative. Through her grit and motivation, she became one of the leaders who spoke out against her village's water problem. With the help of WaterAid, Gita started managing the local Reverse Osmosis plant, and became a successful entrepreneur selling the water and becoming financially independent.

She created the Golap Mohila Dal -- a women's group that has continued to inspire women to break the stigma faced in her village. In 2022, Gita ran for the Union Parishad election (Bangladesh's lowest local government unit) and won.

We are sure that the Gita's journey was not smooth. She had to prove herself in the male-dominated society. Strong determination and self-confidence led her to overcome all the hurdles on her way, and succeed in acquiring a leadership role in society and restoring her dignity as a "human being," creating an example for any woman to follow.

Over a span of 27 years, Rani has felt shy, embarrassed, humiliated, and suffered childhood trauma, which has rendered her dignity fragile. While we talk about water as a human right, we must deep dive into how we can uphold the dignity of people facing dignity issues due to lack of access to natural resources, especially resources like water. A conversation about water rights should be practiced equally when we talk about upholding women's dignity alongside gender-based violence, forced marriages, physical violence, amongst others. This is a much needed discourse in our ongoing fight against water security and climate justice.

All women can aspire to become like Gita Roy, regardless of their circumstances. At the same time, the societal mindset should also change towards women and facilitate them to uphold their rights and dignity. Perhaps the time has come for these women to become the phoenix rising from the ashes. We need to plan how we can better assist those who can't, especially when it comes to assessing vulnerability and dignity.

We sincerely hope all women can become who they want to be. Let's all work together to stand beside them for upholding their dignity, and take on the rightful place they deserve. ■

Adnan Qader is working on climate advocacy with WaterAid Bangladesh. Hasin Jahan is the country director and a prominent gender rights activist working with WaterAid Bangladesh.

The history of BRAC addressing climate change

AT THIS MOMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE HAS BECOME AN EXISTENTIAL CHALLENGE FOR ALL LIVING BEINGS, AS SIR FAZLE HASAN ABED HAD SO RIGHTFULLY POINTED OUT



COURTESY

Dr Md Liakath Ali

In 1970, a catastrophic cyclone ravaged Bhola, killing 300,000 people; what followed was even more devastating, a nine-month-long war for independence. This is how the story began for Bangladesh. 50 years later, the story continues as the country thrived on staying in the spotlight again.

Many well-wishers and stakeholders, including international aid agencies and NGOs, have accompanied this nation during its journey. Among these, a name that cannot be denied or unseen is Bangladesh Rehabilitation Assistance Committee. As of now, the largest and number one NGO globally, was born in Bangladesh -- now known as BRAC.

BRAC was established in 1972 to work towards relief and rehabilitation for the rural poor to cope with the devastation they had been going through. Soon, it started development activities for the alleviation of poverty. Today, it is a 50-year-old organization that has touched the lives of 120 million people around the world through its development interventions.

These interventions were aimed to eliminate extreme poverty, expand financial choices, provide employable skills for better-paid work, tackle climate change events, respond to emergencies, promote gender equality, ensure universal healthcare, develop urban settlements, and invest in the next generation in enterprises.

No one could have ever thought that a temporarily established relief organization would become the leading organization in its field. BRAC has been working to enhance the resilience of the most vulnerable and marginalized rural people of Bangladesh from its very beginning. Even though today, BRAC is a much more mature organization with powerful strategies, appropriate policies, flexible financing, and well-programmed need-based actions, it still addresses the underlying challenges of society and not merely the symptoms.

One of the crucial features of BRAC is its well-timed delivery of tailored and target-oriented services to the community. During its early operational period, BRAC concentrated on village development programs that included agriculture, fisheries, cooperatives, rural crafts, adult literacy, health and family planning, vocational training for women, and construction of community centres. These programs essentially targeted the poorest of the poor -- the landless, small farmers, artisans, and vulnerable women. This was a much-needed step towards the development of society back then.

In the second half of the '70s, it focused on working more closely with the poor to set an example of locally-led actions. The centre of this engagement became an organizational structure called the "Village Organization (VO)." Through the organized activities of VOs, more development efforts emerged, consisting of skills development, improvement of health and education, provision of capital, and opportunistic creation of income-generating activities.

BRAC worked closely to develop the socio-economic status of the people and pioneered Research and Development (R&D) activities in agriculture to achieve a long-term goal that focused on the fragile climatic conditions, considering the geographical location of Bangladesh.

BRAC and International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)

launched to develop low-input and stress- (drought, submergence, and salinity) tolerant rice varieties. Meanwhile, in 1994, BRAC started promoting hybrid maize seeds in collaboration with the Integrated Maize Promotion Project (IMPP), funded by International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre (CIMMYT).

In 2000, BRAC Agricultural Research Development Centre (BARDC) started to look at its research and discoveries in a problem-oriented, adaptive, and participatory manner. Usually, all its discoveries were disseminated through a participatory approach where farmers were invited to share their opinion on the performance of the crop.

Followed by BRAC's success in agricultural R&D, BRAC initiated agricultural extension services by the Agriculture and Food Security Program (AFSP) through large block demonstrations that operated in climate-vulnerable zones -- for instance, saline and drought-prone areas.

BRAC realized that frequent climate change-induced natural and man-made disasters have been affecting the lives of millions of Bangladeshis; this could threaten to hinder or even reverse the progress achieved so far in poverty alleviation.

Providing relief to disaster-affected populations was already one of BRAC's very first goals. Upon realizing the additional threats, BRAC has been rapidly responding to the onset of climatic events by modifying many of its program designs. Right after cyclone Sidr in 2007 hit the coasts of Bangladesh, BRAC initiated the Disaster, Environment, and Climate Change (DECC) program to help the communities manage the devastation.

Some 10 years later, the DECC program was renamed as Disaster Management and Climate Change (DMCC); in 2018, the DMCC program was split into BRAC Humanitarian Program (BHP) and Climate Change Program (CCP) in alignment with BRAC's Climate Change Strategy, 2016-2020.

BRAC Climate Change Program provides climate-vulnerable people with access to the tools and knowledge to adapt and respond to the adverse climatic changes and adopt various sustainable practices to combat the impending climatic impacts.

This program aims to motivate people to adapt and respond to climate change consequences while collaborating through sustainable development strategies to manage potential climate change impacts.

Apart from a program solely dedicated to addressing climate change impacts, BRAC also has six other programs that directly or indirectly reflect significant efforts to tackle climate change through locally-led adaptation actions. These programs are BRAC Education program (BEP), BRAC Disaster Risk Management program, Integrated Development program (IDP), Ultra Poor Graduation program (UPGP), Urban Development program (UDP) and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) program.

“BRAC realized that frequent climate change-induced natural and man-made disasters have been affecting the lives of millions of Bangladeshis”

At this moment, climate change has become an existential challenge for all living beings, as Sir Fazle Hasan Abed had so rightfully pointed out. Now the question is; how will BRAC continue to contribute to embracing climate actions through its remarkable adaptive management features?

BRAC understands the complexity of climate change and the many dimensions it involves -- science, economics, society, politics, and moral and ethical questions. Not to mention this is a global problem, felt on local scales, that will be around for decades and centuries to come.

Therefore, BRAC continues to take all the possible efforts to cope with the changing climate and support the most vulnerable to identify their potential to thrive. The organization has opened new windows for channeling multiple financial solutions to facilitate a paradigm shift at the local level.

BRAC's recent solution to financing local level actions, known as the "Climate Bridge Fund," is currently aiming to bridge the gap between financing short term projects for urban adaptation measures and climate-induced migration, to provide finance over a longer period with a predictable timescale to ensure better access to funding by local actors.

BRAC also emphasizes creating linkages with the private sector to establish a timely support system to foster adaptation and locally-led actions. Moreover, BRAC is also trying to get accredited to Green Climate Fund (GCF) as a direct access entity (DAE), which has a window for getting funding for local-level adaptation actions.

Furthermore, BRAC Microfinance (MF) program aims to provide innovative and sustainable livelihood support to their clients, especially women, expected to lead to economic growth and eventually result in better living standards and resilience to climate change and natural disasters.

"Small is beautiful, but the scale is necessary." A byword often heard at the NGO best known for its scale. Over the years, BRAC has grown to become the largest NGO globally. The entity is leaving behind its legacy in every aspect of its programmatic activities.

As the founder of BRAC, Sir Fazle Hasan Abed, once said, "as time passed, we feel that we have not outlived our utility and need to do more and more." In 2022, as BRAC will celebrate its 50th anniversary of being present as a catalyst and provider of opportunities for people living in poverty, here's to hoping it can scale up, prioritize, innovate, and mainstream its effective climate resilience efforts in its all-programmatic approach, and design to facilitate the highest level of locally-led climate actions in future. ■

Dr Md Liakath Ali is the director of the Climate Change program (CCP) at BRAC and BRAC International, and Urban Development program (UDP) at BRAC.

The experience of Friendship SPO

20 YEARS OF ADAPTATION SOLUTIONS FOR THE CLIMATE VULNERABLE



Friendship Cyclone Shelter

COURTESY

Runa Khan and Kazi Amdadul Hoque

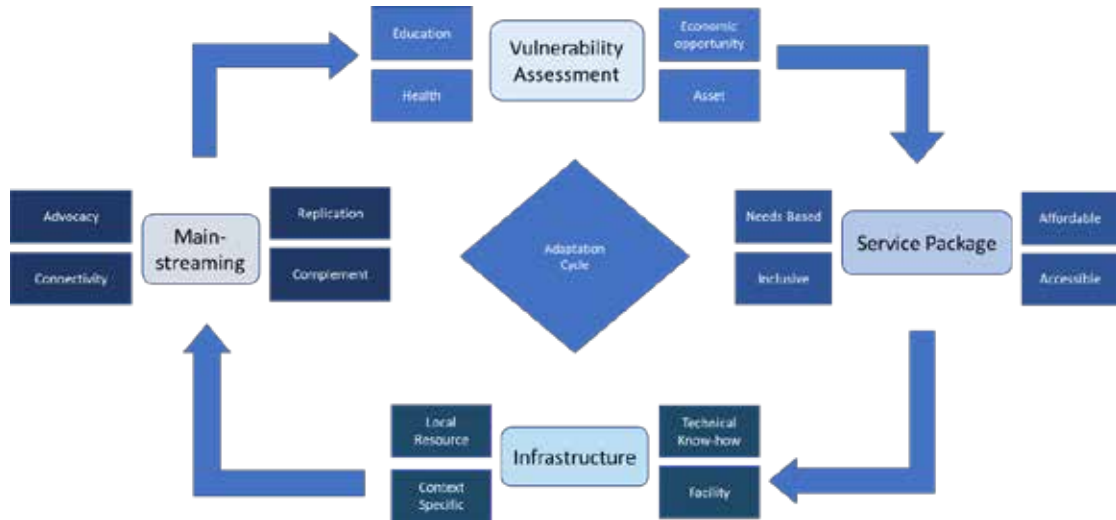
From a country facing the most pressing of climate induced disaster vulnerability, FRIENDSHIP is a social purpose organization that develops scalable adaptation solutions to strengthen the resilience of marginalised communities. With its working area consisting 100% of climate vulnerable population, the organization's path has interesting lessons on adaptation. This article attempts to explore and connect the dots of their work from the beginning.

Bangladesh sits on the world's largest delta, home to a rich and diverse playground of lives, between the Himalayas and its melting glaciers in the north, the Bay of Bengal in south, and hundreds of rivers flowing in between. This makes it the most exposed region to rising sea levels and unusual weather conditions, to climate and weather-related and geophysical hazards, due to its topography and geographical location. Nearly a third of the country is susceptible to tidal inundation and 70% is flooded every year during heavy monsoons. This situation strongly

affects the ecosystems and the exploitation of the already restricted natural resources. The unpredictable, frequent, and multiple disasters, poverty, and lack of opportunities remain a threat to its population of 166 million. Therefore, the question of resilience of the communities becomes crucial. 20 million people are projected to be displaced by 2050 because of climate change (WEF).

Within Bangladesh, more vulnerable are the people living in the northern river islands, where an estimated 10 million people live. These people need to shift their homes from 20-40 times in their lifetime due to floods and river erosion. Also particularly vulnerable are the people in the southern coastal belt, who are constantly the subject of climate disasters and salinity. Five aspects keep on pushing these people away from a path of prosperity-- the climate and impact of climate change, disasters, poverty trap that they find hard to come out of, lack of opportunity due to inadequate infrastructure and support service, and lack of life skills and knowledge which lowers their self-esteem, and therefore, dignity.

To design a proper intervention, Friendship goes



“Bangladesh sits on the world’s largest delta, home to a rich and diverse playground of lives, between the Himalayas and its melting glaciers in the north, the Bay of Bengal in south, and hundreds of rivers flowing in between”

through four steps to make sure the right thing is given in the right time, in the right amount and importantly in the right way. Starting with “vulnerability assessment,” it was at first apparent that the communities living in the shifting river islands healthcare as a top priority. Easily curable diseases were going untreated due to difficulty in travelling to mainland. This led to a health scenario that lagged behind the country average. For people living in nomadic islands, thus the ‘service package’ design had to incorporate this lifestyle and introduced hospital ships. Based on the needs, in due time two more tiers were added with the hospital ships as satellite clinics and community medic aides, increasing the inclusivity and access of the services. In the infrastructure step, a focus was given in making the service resilient to changes in the environment. Local resources were incorporated into the intervention with hundreds of community medic-aides and paramedics, midwives getting trained and performing important services for their respective locality. In the final step, the focus is on ‘mainstreaming’, with referral services being created to government medical facilities, other facilities, complementing the government in important immunization programs to have significant change at the field level. At every step, the prospect of the work was set in ambitious standards from the beginning. In practice, indigenous knowledge was welcomed while designing the adaptive solutions. Modern experts were also given their space to ensure the best possible service to be rendered.

Similarly, in an effort to empower to community to



Lifebuoy Friendship Hospital

COURTESY

the next level, when the Education program was started, the initial vulnerability assessment indicated a few key issues. These were the nomadic nature of the islands, static schools not being able to withstand the erosions, and a lack of good teacher pool willing to live and serve the students in the islands. To tackle this, the ‘service package’ incorporated dismantlable schools, and ICT enabled lessons. At the infrastructure step, parent-teacher groups were formed to ensure continuity of schools even after erosion causes them to shift islands. Local resources were recruited and trained to serve as teachers and facilitators, and the community learnt how to dismantle the schools and relocate in times of crisis. As part of mainstreaming, these students are now actively being connected to higher education and job opportunities.

In terms of economic opportunity, at the first step, the vulnerability comes from lack of infrastructure, lack of adequate knowledge and tools to make good use of money while living in disaster prone area means savings are often wiped away. Thus the service packaging took this into account to introduce adult literacy programs, alongside climate adaptive agricultural training, and assistance, as well as familiarizing them with tools of savings tracking and using new technologies to increase income. At the infrastructure step, groups were formed at the community level to take major decisions with a more holistic vision, para-veterinarians were trained to help with cattle, clean solar power made accessible that led to increased productivity and life standard. For mainstreaming: Market linkage was facilitated, and connectivity with government’s social safety net program. Creating micro

social entrepreneurs aligned with green technology at each level of service needs.

Asset vulnerability is the lack in long term facilities and know-how. The northern river island has been disadvantaged in this area due to the remoteness of the locations. Here the service package thus focuses on transferring know-how in resilient building, disaster preparedness mapping and training. For the infrastructure step, Friendship built flood-resilient raised cluster village, helped make raised house, cattle sheds, emergency boat transport during crisis. And lastly to mainstream, advocacy efforts are in place to share the knowledge of working in such areas and help take better steps for the communities. An example of such a step is that The Standard Guideline for Rural H

With the cycle complete, a community has a distinct set of vulnerability which demands a different kind of intervention in the next phase of development. Quality delivery remained always an essential component of the way Friendship worked. This method of intervention design and implementation resembled the modern design thinking process, with emphasis given on the initial assessment, welcoming 360-degree input and then proceeding to lead with an appropriate option, keeping in mind the agility required to adapt to changing circumstances. This is how the program organically grew from a focus on Saving Lives, Poverty Alleviation, Climate Adaptation, to Empowerment. Today Friendship is reaching with their services to seven million people annually. The lessons from working in the most adverse conditions were embedded into the leadership

and program implementation process. Enabling the organisation to become important responders in natural disasters like Cyclone Sidr, unforeseen event like the COVID-19 pandemic, and a key player as the second largest national healthcare providers in the Rohingya camps after the 2017 influx.

Having the processed homed in for designing and implementing adaptation solutions, with the likes of hospital ships supported by satellite clinics and community medic-aides, ICT-enabled dismantlable schools, government service connectivity and legal aid– the scope for integrated approach was clear. It was evident that a community could be elevated much faster if an integrated solution was established with them, with a long-term vision in mind. This was revealed in a

“With this record, the organization is now a champion of localization of funding, calling for increased local control of funds, of expertise, of decision-making capacity”

Goynarpotol of Kurigram, where with an integrated approach, in 5 years there was remarkable change in the key indicators:

- **Child Health:** 93% mother perform exclusive breastfeeding of their infants (0-6 months) whereas baseline was 48.3%.
- **Hygiene Practice:** 94% people wash their hands before consuming any food whereas baseline was 28%.
- **Birth Registration:** 76% people perform birth registration of their child whereas baseline was 25%.
- **Protecting Child Marriage:** 96.5% people answered correctly about the legal age of marriage whereas baseline was 29.6%
93% of mothers believe their girls have no barriers to education compared to 82.3% in the baseline.

More than half of the respondents (54.8%) are saving their money whereas two-thirds of the surveyed people in the baseline study mentioned that they did not save their money. Overall, the average amount of savings had been increased by 47.8%.

After the success of integration and expansion, the adaptation solutions are ripe for replication, which has been validated with the ongoing process of 5 more hospital ships that will launch, with integrated services tied to it, covering a far larger population than before. The social purpose organisation is focusing on knowledge sharing and capacity exchange in a structured way, with collaborations with universities and publications at home and abroad.

With this record, the organization is now a champion of localization of funding, calling for increased local control of funds, of expertise, of decision-making capacity. With the whole world going through “the great reset”, where, according to the World Economic Forum, we are fundamentally changing the traditional context for decision-making. It is worth taking note of the way adaptation solutions have worked and evolved for people living in the forefront of climate impact. It is a modern design thinking challenge, and requires great empathy and commitment to values, to find the best service-infrastructure combination that can stand the test of time.

Runa Khan is a Rolex Laureate, Ashoka Fellow, and the Founder of Friendship SPO. Kazi Amdadul Hoque is the Senior Director, Strategic Planning and Climate Action at Friendship SPO.

Housing in Disaster Prone Areas of Bangladesh was developed by the Housing and Building Research Institute (HBRI), in collaboration with Friendship.

recent survey for the 2017 intervention in the river island

Resource mobilization for climate change adaptation in Bangladesh

BANGLADESH HAS BEEN DEMONSTRATING STRONG POLITICAL COMMITMENT TO ADDRESS THE ISSUES ASSOCIATED WITH CLIMATE CHANGE

Dr Fazle Rabbi Sadeque Ahmed

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries due to climate change impacts. The low-lying land at the end of one of the world's largest river delta systems makes Bangladesh more prone to natural disasters, like flash floods, monsoon floods, landslides, cyclones, storm surge, salinity intrusion, drought, and unpredictable rainfall.

According to the Global Climate Change Risk Index, over

the period 1998-2017, Bangladesh ranked ninth among the countries most affected by climate change-induced natural disasters. As per the World Bank, since the past 40 years, the average GDP loss due to climate disasters has been from 0.5% to 1% annually. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) already invests about Tk25,000 crore -- close to \$3 billion a year for addressing climate change impacts. Nonetheless, the international finance support for climate change adaptation (CCA) is minimal and has the opportunity to scale up.



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN



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Legal and policy framework on climate finance

The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has adopted a wide range of policies and mechanisms at macro and sectoral levels to tackle climate change. Currently, Bangladesh is developing its National Adaptation Plan (NAP). While Bangladesh was one of the first least-developed countries (LDCs) to develop its National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA) in 2005, it did not have a financing strategy.

Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) was adopted to mainstream climate actions in its economy and society, and it has been updated, which the GoB will adopt soon. The Climate Fiscal Framework (CFF) was adopted in 2014 to model the country's Public Financial Management (PFM) system as climate inclusive. It was updated in 2020.

In 2015, the Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) was submitted and updated in 2021. The Perspective Plan (2021-2041) and the 8th Five Year Plan, Annual Development Plans, and other sectoral plans integrated climate change actions.

Landscape of National Adaptation Finance

Climate Change Trust Fund (CCTF): Against the backdrop of the inadequacy of climate finance from multilateral and

bilateral sources, the Government of Bangladesh created the Climate Change Trust Fund (CCTF) in 2009 from its revenue. It also enacted the Climate Change Trust Act 2010 to provide CCTF with a legal footing.

The CCTF was created to combat climate change impacts and implement Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), 2009, undertaking projects based on the thematic areas and programs mentioned in BCCSAP. Up to FY 2020-21, CCTF received a total allocation of Tk4,100 crore, and till December 2021, a total of 800 projects under CCTF have been approved.

The Government Ministries/Divisions are implementing 462 projects while different NGOs are implementing the remaining 63 projects under the supervision of the Palli Karma Sahayak Foundation (PKSF). Out of the allocated financing, around 75% is linked with climate change adaptation.

Country Investment Plan for Environment, Forestry, and Climate Change (CIP_EFCC)

The total cost of the CIP has been estimated at \$11.7 billion, of which 40% has already been financed through the government's sources and contributions from development partners. The financing gaps, therefore, stand at \$7 billion of the total cost of CIP.

Budget allocation of selected ministries/divisions on climate linked activities

The climate change-related allocation and expenditure trend of 25 Ministries/Divisions are presented here, with climate actions and priorities of varying scale covering the period from FY 2015-16 to FY 2019-20. The total budget allocation of these 25 Ministries/Divisions accounts for 58.11% of the national budget of FY 2019-20.

It is also found that in FY2015-16, the climate change-relevant allocation was Tk12,163 crore in absolute terms and stood at Tk23,748 crore in FY 2019-20, which is 0.7% and 0.8% of GDP, respectively.

Landscape of international adaptation finance

The major international sources of climate finance are Adaptation Fund, Least Developed Countries Fund (LDCF), and the only dedicated climate fund, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) -- the largest global vehicle for disbursing climate finance from developed countries to poorer nations.

Bangladesh received three projects from the LDCF worth about \$20 million in grant and got one project from the Adaptation Fund worth about \$10 million in grant. The GCF is the largest source of climate finance globally which is governed by a 24-member board comprised equally of developed and developing countries, representing the United Nations Regional Groups.

In 2015, a climate-resilient infrastructure mainstreaming project of KfW and LGED was approved, amounting to \$40 million in grant. In 2018, a UNDP project on enhancing the adaptive capacity of coastal communities of Bangladesh received \$25 million in grant. A project of PKSF called Extended Community Climate Change Project - Flood (ECCCP-Flood) was approved by the GCF, worth around \$10 million.

It is the only project under a national entity. Out of the approved six projects, the above three projects are linked with climate change adaptation.

In 2012, Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF) was initiated as a donor-supported fund from bilateral sources. This climate financing provision disbursed \$71.13 million by the end of December 2016. The NGOs in Bangladesh are also doing many different activities -- directly and indirectly linked to some extent to climate change adaptation.

Recent data in this area are not available, and one estimate shows that foreign funding was around \$ 695 million in FY 2014-15, according to the NGO Affairs Bureau. Out of that financing, the allocation for climate change adaptation is unknown.

Bangladesh has been demonstrating strong political commitment to address the issues associated with climate change and taking forward the climate change agenda

“Commitment and financial flow from developed countries continue to be very low”

to combat its adverse effects. These commitments are adequately reflected in supportive policy and legal regime and national financial windows and gradual growth of its allocation.

However, the commitment and financial flow from developed countries continue to be very low compared to vulnerable countries like Bangladesh. The developed countries should commit to allocating \$100 billion per year, and a balanced allocation between adaptation and mitigation should be maintained. ■

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Financing for adaptation in Bangladesh

THE POTENTIAL SOURCES OF FINANCING FOR ADAPTATION IN BANGLADESH



SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

Mizan R Khan and Afsara Binte Mirza

The need for adaptation finance currently and in the future, Bangladesh will be dictated by the economic losses and damages (L&D) inflicted by the recurring and devastating climatic disasters that visit Bangladesh each year. As of yet there are no authoritative, national-level L&D assessments in Bangladesh, but international development agencies like the Asian Development Bank predict that 2% to 9% of our GDP might be lost a year by 2050 due to climate change impacts.

The government of Bangladesh already invests about Tk25,000 crore (close to \$3 billion) a year for addressing climate change impacts. Against this, the international finance support for climate change adaptation (CCA) is minimal -- contributing about 20% of the needed investments. The Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) estimated overall adaptation measures will cost \$42bn (2015-2030) in the major 10 sectors of our economy. Most finance will go towards “comprehensive disaster management” followed by flood and riverbank erosion protection.

A study by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) based in London shows that the rural households in Bangladesh already invest over \$2bn per year for protecting themselves against the recurring climate disasters, at the expense of other household needs. Nevertheless, it is difficult to have a proximate quantified value of Bangladesh's adaptation needs for the widely differing cost estimates from climate impacts. There are seven main sources for climate change-related financing of which the domestic sources include: (1) Revenue budget, (2) Annual Development Programme (ADP), (3) Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund, and the international sources include (4) multilateral climate funds including the Green Climate Fund, (5) bilateral aid and multilateral development bank (MDB) funds, and (6) INGO funds. But these sources of public financing will suffice at all, compared to the growing need for adaptation.

So, our piece shares some ideas about a few potential sources of private financing and public-private partnerships as sources of finance for adaptation in Bangladesh.

Private sector finance such as insurance and green bonds

In Bangladesh, there is sizable access of people and communities to savings, bank loans, microfinance, and mobile financial services. Here the need for insurance comes as a risk management and risk transfer tool. Local communities in Bangladesh can be capacitated to deal with insurance schemes, especially by the smallholder farmers. However, though small-scale farmer insurance schemes started back in the 1980s in Bangladesh and since then many pilots have been undertaken by many national and international organizations, they remained at pilot scales. Why are they not scaling? This is something we need to seriously think about despite the fact that the government has some institutional framework in place.

The green bond is a unique initiative of using debt capital markets to fund climate solutions; for instance Sajida Foundation aims to use the funds raised through the Green Zero-Coupon Bond to increase the outreach of its microfinance program as well as ensure environmental development like agriculture, sanitation, and solar projects. But our development finance still mostly depends on bank financing. The bond market remains underdeveloped. For this, viable PPP models need to be devised where the government can provide incentives through tax exemptions and low-interest loans from public banks and the private sector must come forward with a sense of social and environmental responsibility to the society.

So some kind of blended finance through PPP denotes the use of concessional and non-grant financing sources. In Bangladesh, where public finance remains constrained, blended finance could be an option to meet the adaptation needs. In this case, the tax-GDP ratio could be raised through

better mobilization of tax to enhance public resources for incentivizing private sources.

Payments for ecosystem services (PES) works through paying landholders or farmers for actions that preserve the services to public and environmental health provided by ecosystems on their property, including services that contribute to both climate change adaptation and mitigation. There are ample cases of mitigation-focused PES schemes

“ For this, viable PPP models need to be devised where the government can provide incentives through tax exemptions and low-interest loans from public banks and the private sector must come forward with a sense of social and environmental responsibility to the society ”

and more recently evidence is emerging of the use of PES for adaptation which is of pilot nature and location-specific in many regions across the world.

We must learn about this.

Locally-led adaptations

Debt for adaptation swap can help uptake more locally-led adaptations (LLA) funding by including the debtor countries, local governments, and actors. Since LLA focuses on local leadership, communities can complement pool funding for adaptation. The new Climate Bridge Fund established under Brac with support from Germany through KfW works directly to address injustices faced by climate refugees in urban slums in Khulna, Rajshahi, Barisal, Sirajganj, and Satkhira.

The projects improve the provision of basic services including water, sanitation and hygiene, housing facilities and waste management, livelihood development, and access to financial services. This fund can be harnessed to support more adaptation projects, and mobilize local leaders as agents of change.

The United Nations Capital Development Fund's (UNCDF) Local Climate Adaptive Living Facility (LoCAL) has been piloted in Bangladesh and the upshot was instrumental, especially for vulnerable women and girls in remote villages. The grant resonated sustainability in terms of providing lifelong livelihood options to adapt to climate change.

Green microcredit

The microfinance institutions (MFIs) can put terms and conditions for a housing loan, and advise their clients to use a design that is sustainable. For instance, Grameen Bank borrowers are required to follow a certain building design that integrates concrete pillars and corrugated sheets for better adapting to climate change. Similarly, the borrowers could also be motivated to plant trees around their houses to provide protection from destructive winds and receding floodwaters.

International sources

In the coming years, the Green Climate Fund (GCF) and the Adaptation Fund (AF) are going to be the sizable vehicles of CF. This will require capacity building for negotiations and bargaining. It is therefore vital to utilize the Readiness Support program of GCF. It is believed that much more money can be mobilized annually for adaptation. This will require two things: Capacity building to write fundable projects; better and more transparent fiduciary management systems.

However, the guiding principles must include a whole-of-society approach including all the stakeholders, namely the government at national and local levels, private sector, NGOs/civil society, INGOs, women groups, the youth, the media, and development partners must be in regular dialogue and consultation to guide the strategy. Additionally, prioritization of funding with a programmatic approach, with setting of criteria, such as the vulnerability of people versus growth of specific economic sectors will be crucial for financing future adaptation in Bangladesh.

This people-centric lens in all investments, including the now preferred areas of infrastructure building by our sectoral leaders, must be the guiding criteria if we want to realize the vision of the Father of the Nation Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujib. ■

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SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

How is Bangladesh writing the history of adaptation?

OUR NATION'S ROLE AS A VANGUARD AGAINST THE CLIMATE CRISIS IS INDISPUTABLE

Saleemul Huq

After the publication of the third assessment report of the Inter-governmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2001, the world came to realize that adverse impacts of human-

induced climate change would become inevitable and unavoidable and hence all countries had to prepare for those adverse impacts through adaptation. A corollary of that finding was that while all countries, both rich as well as poor, would eventually be adversely impacted, the first to suffer would be poor people in poor countries.

This led to an analysis of which countries would be most vulnerable to such impacts of climate change and in almost all the many global rankings Bangladesh would be either the most vulnerable or at least amongst the top three most vulnerable countries.

Thus the scientists and leaders of Bangladesh were made aware of its extreme vulnerability to climate change over two decades ago and since then the country has invested in preparing itself to deal with those impacts.

This process has gone through several very important phases that have broadened the understanding of what needs to be done and by whom. These lessons are not only applicable to Bangladesh, but for all countries both poor and rich.

The first lesson that was learned was that the country must invest in developing its own national scientific capacity to study the issue and provide evidence-based guidance to decision makers on what needs to be done. Bangladesh was well endowed with climate change experts who formed a major platform called Gobeshona which brought together over 50 universities and research institutions who were doing

“ While all countries, both rich as well as poor, would eventually be adversely impacted, the first to suffer would be poor people in poor countries ”

research on different aspects of tackling climate change. These universities have also been investing in building capacity of their students on how to adapt to climate change.

The second important lesson was that the country could not wait for the rest of the world to provide the necessary funds to carry out the adaptation needed. Hence the government of Bangladesh pioneered the creation of a Climate Change Trust Fund over 10 years ago and it has funded hundreds of adaptation projects around the country, both by government ministries, agencies as well as by civil society organizations.

This has then evolved into incorporating climate change into the national budget. The national budget of 2021-2022 has 8%

allocated to tackle climate change across twenty five ministries and also through NGOs. At the same time the country is also trying to access global funds but is not waiting for that funding before acting.

The third lesson was to realize that tackling climate change could not be done effectively by the government alone but needed a whole-of-society approach where every sector in the country needed to know what it had to do and was enabled to take necessary actions. The most important sector was the most vulnerable communities in the different climate vulnerable parts of the country. This has resulted in Bangladesh being acknowledged as a global leader in locally-led adaptation (LLA). Thus Bangladesh is now providing technical assistance to other countries on LLA.

The fourth, and perhaps most important, lesson has been that adaptation to climate change while certainly being specific to every unique location. Nevertheless, there is an enormous amount of global significance in shared learning across scale and time. Thus Bangladesh is going to be sharing its experiential knowledge of adaptation with the rest of the world through the recently set up Global Hub on LLA at the Dhaka office of the Global Center on Adaptation (GCA).

Going forward, Bangladesh is also going to invest in preparing for the losses and damages from human-induced climate change, which has already become a reality that all countries in the world will have to face, whether they are prepared or not.

Let me conclude by describing how Bangladesh has evolved its conception and practice to deal with adaptation to climate change. In the initial years, the emphasis was on examining the extent of our vulnerability to climate change impacts. Still, we moved from examining the problem to tackling the issues and finding solutions. This changed the paradigm from a focus on vulnerability to becoming resilient.

The country is now going up the learning curve to becoming more climate-resilient. It is now on the threshold of another paradigm shift from resilience, which is about risk management, to prosperity through the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCP), which aims to enable Bangladesh to do incremental adaptation and transformational adaptation.

The countries in the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) have already agreed to follow our example and produce their own Climate Prosperity Plan with technical assistance from Bangladesh.

Thus, as every country in the world moves to adapt itself to the adverse impacts of climate change, Bangladesh will undoubtedly be a global leader in helping others adapt effectively and thus make the whole world better adapted. ■

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