

SEARCHING WAYS FORWARD FOR BANGLADESH IN THE TIME OF PANDEMIC



Climate Change and Disaster Management Challenges in Bangladesh

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1. Introduction: Climate Change, the greatest threat demanding integrated actions:

Climate Change (CC) is the greatest threat that mankind faces in the twenty-first century. The process is global while impacts are most often regional, national or local, demanding integrated actions. The responses are multi-sectoral involving land, water, energy, socio-economic systems, human health, productive capacities and sustainable development opportunities.



The CC accentuates most of the natural and man-made disasters including floods, cyclones, water surges, sea level rise, and saline intrusion in land and water. It also increases droughts, heat stresses, wildfires, deforestation, desertification, acidification of oceans and reduction in marine productivity. The CC contributes to insecurities in food, water and energy. It is a great driver of global injustice and market failures leading to social instabilities and sometime conflicts.

2. Major Climate Issues faced by Bangladesh- Present and Future:

Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries to the impacts of global climate change. According to the Global Climate Risk Index (GCRI) by the Germanwatch (2020), Bangladesh has been placed as the 7th most vulnerable country in the world.

A set of twelve well-identified complex and reinforcing CC stresses and impacts in Bangladesh (Rahman, 2017) are: (1) Sea Level Rise, (2) Cyclones (intensity & frequency) (3) Deeper penetration of saline water (4) Erratic rainfall (5) Floods (intensity & frequency, (6) Droughts, (7) River Bank Erosion, (8) Health, (9) Food Security, (10) Water Security, (11) Land Slides in Chittagong Hill Tracts and (12) CC Induced Human Displacement and Migration.

Further Global temperatures have already increased by over one degree centigrade above the pre-industrial period.

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3. Disaster Management:

Climate induced disasters are impacting all parts of Bangladesh. People are losing their assets and livelihoods in rural and urban areas. Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP 2100) has identified six climate hotspots with multiple hazards. These are (1) Coastal Regions, (2) Barind Tract and Drought Prone Areas of North West Parts of Bangladesh, (3) Haor and Flash Flood Areas, (4) Riverine Systems and Estuaries, (5) Chittagong Hill Tracts and (6) Urban Areas.

The GCRI found that 191 natural disasters hit Bangladesh during the period between 1999 and 2019. Nine natural disasters out of 10 are related to hydro-meteorological and CC issues. These are undermining Bangladesh's achievements of SDGs by 2030 and the vision of becoming an advanced economy by 2041. But the government, civil society, private sector and all other actors are confronting the CC impact with skills and investment. Global finance is most important.



4. Key Priorities and Strategies in Bangladesh:

The key strategies, policies and responses can be summarized into four groups of actions.

- 4.1. Mitigation: These measures aim to stop human induced emission reduction of Green House Gases (GHGs) including CO₂.
- 4.2. Adaptation: These actions aim to reduce risks and vulnerability of the affected people, society, ecosystems and economic activities due to CC impacts.
- 4.3. Capacity Building, Research and Knowledge, Innovative Technology: These are essential for developing appropriate skilled human resources, knowledge and technology.
- 4.4. Finance, Resource, Good Governance and Institutionalization: These are essential actions to support all implementation of policies, strategies, plans, programs, projects and governance.

In fact, Bangladesh government and all other actors have made significant progress. For Bangladesh, because of its high vulnerability, the priority is to promote planned and transformative adaptation and sustainable development of all vulnerable sectors and groups. The local level vulnerable communities have made significant contributions by adapting with their coping strategies and informal responses.

5. Key Responses to CC challenges:

Bangladesh has become the world leader in Adaptation to climate change. Former UN Secretary-General Ban-Ki-Moon recently said that, "Bangladesh is our greatest teacher in Adaptation". In terms of policy development, Bangladesh has also been a leader. The following key policies, strategies and plans have been developed as responses to CC challenges:

- 5.1. NAPA (The National Programme of Adaptation): 2005
- 5.2. BCCSAP (Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan): 2009, 2020
- 5.3. BCCTF (Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund): 2009
- 5.4. NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution): 2015, 2020
- 5.5. NAP (National Adaptation Plan): 2020
- 5.6. Parliamentary Decision: The Bangladesh Parliament has recently declared CC as a "Planetary Emergency", 2020
- 5.7. Most Vulnerable Country Forum: Bangladesh Prime Minister has been elected the Chair of this important forum from January 1, 2021 for 2 years.
- 5.8. Climate Change Gender Plan: 2016
- 5.9. Climate Fiscal Framework: 2015
- 5.10. Climate Public Expenditure and Institutional Review: 2012



6. The Impacts of COVID-19 on Climate Related Issues:

The COVID-19 Pandemic impacted the people, livelihoods and economy of Bangladesh very badly. This pandemic has enhanced health risk, increased poverty, food insecurity, social inequity and vulnerability of millions, particularly women in Bangladesh. As vaccination opportunities are nearing. All efforts must be made to access all Bangladeshi citizens with COVID-19 vaccine, as soon as possible and free of charge.

7. Way Forward to Address the Challenges:

UNEP in their recent report, 2019 called - "The New Insights in Climate Science" shared the critical signs of global climate change with some warnings and called upon the global communities and actors to act urgently. The key warnings are: (1) climate change is faster and stronger than expected; (2) the world is not on the right track; (3) weather extremes have become - a new normal across the globe; (4) the poor are hit the hardest; and (5) time may have come for social tipping points on climate actions.

We have to address simultaneously the physical impacts of CC and natural disasters, the social vulnerability and the challenges of sustainable development. These are to be achieved through right policies, strategies, institutionalization and effective implementation with better development and good governance outcomes. Emerging convergence and synergies developed in 2015 between (a) SDGs, (b) Sendai Framework for DRR and (c) Paris Climate Agreement has created enormous opportunities for Bangladesh. Experiences and learning from communities in different ecosystems on CC Adaptation must be integrated. Science based awareness, policies, strategies and response must be the basis of all national initiatives.

More recently, CC has been institutionalized into the Ministry of Environments, Forests and Climate Change. But CC still remains a fledgling "wing". It must be rapidly upgraded into a separate "Department of Climate Change" and independent division with skilled manpower in Negotiations, Mitigation, Adaptation, Capacity Building, Financial Resources Mobilization and Science based policy research. Collaboration with research institutes, think tanks, NGOs, planning processes, SGDs and other government agencies offer a great opportunity. Institutionalization and good governance practices would be major components of all initiatives on CC.

Bangladesh must keep its rapid economic growth and achievements moving forward. For this, growth to be inclusive, equitable and sustainable, integration of CC in all its socio-economic activities would be essential.