

**PROBLEMS AND ISSUES OF CLIMATE CHANGE
IN BANGLADESH AND ASIA REGION, AND COOPERATION
WITH EU-GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE ALLIANCE¹**

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Global climate change is upon us and it is intensifying. In fact, it is now the greatest threat to the global society and to the planet Earth itself. All the countries of the world face its adverse consequences. But the developing countries are particularly at the receiving end of the impacts. The least developed countries (LDCs), in particular the most vulnerable countries including the small island developing states (SIDS) are the worst sufferers. These countries face socio-economic and environmental devastations for no fault of theirs.

The evolving global climate change is anthropogenic and the responsibility for it lies squarely with the developed countries which have emitted huge quantities of greenhouse gases (GHGs) into the atmosphere over the past 160 years or more. In recent times, some larger and fast industrializing developing countries are substantially increasing their GHG emissions.

The most vulnerable countries include those countries which are highly disadvantaged in terms of geographical location and characterized by low levels of economic development, widespread poverty, technological backwardness, and very low adaptive capacity.

The Earth is warming, ice is melting, sea-levels are rising, and extreme climatic events such as floods, cyclones, storm surges, hurricanes, and droughts have begun to occur more frequently and devastatingly. The consequent devastations are already shattering the socio-economic and environmental fabrics in many parts of the world; and the threat to humanity and the globe itself is gathering momentum.

Recognizing the unfolding devastations in the wake of climate change, the global community has been talking to find ways of limiting temperature rise to well below 2°C. Other key topics

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under discussion are adaptation, and financial support and technology transfer to the developing countries from the developed world. All these activities are expected to be agreed and conducted within the framework of a shared vision relating to limiting global temperature rise and, at the same time, effectively managing and adapting to climate change impacts, particularly in countries and areas which are at the forefront of these impacts.

Despite the failure to achieve a legally binding global agreement in Copenhagen, it must be recognized that the Copenhagen Accord provides a basis to build on to negotiate a legally binding global agreement for the period following 2012. It is the responsibility of all concerned, but particularly of the developed countries to ensure that another failure in reaching a legally binding global agreement does not await us in Mexico in November 2010.

But the progress so far has been lukewarm, if at all. For example, there is in fact little progress in establishing the promised fund of US\$30 billion for the period up to 2012 and the GHG reduction commitments to be made, consistent with keeping the global temperature rise well below 2⁰C, remain uncertain. This is frustrating. But, the only option before the world community is to come together to convert the stumbling process of the present into a success by Mexico conference to arrest the fast worsening climate change.

Asia is a huge continent consisting of countries of a wide range of sizes in terms of geographical area or population, at different levels of development, of different geographical and climatic realities, facing different internal and external dynamics, emitting different quantities of GHGs per capita per annum ranging from the world's largest in Australia (over 20 tonnes) to very small amounts such as in Bangladesh (0.30 tonnes), and are subject to different types and intensities of climate change impacts. It is difficult to generalize. But, some broad conclusions drawn by the 2007 IPCC 4th Assessment Report (AR4) may be cited by way of an overview.

According to AR4, many sectors in Asia have been affected by climate change. For example, crop yields are declining in many Asian countries, partly due to rising temperature, shifting and changing rainfall, and extreme weather events. Climate change-induced diseases and heat stresses have been occurring in many regional countries. Disturbing changes have been observed in marine and coastal ecosystems. Biodiversity and human health have also been affected in a major way as a result of synergic effects of climate change, rising population,

and failure to take appropriate preventive or corrective action. The number of people facing hunger in Asia is likely to increase by an estimated 49 million by 2020 and 132 million by 2050. This means that poverty will deepen and widen instead of reduction towards its eradication as postulated in MDG-1. The multiple adverse developments in Asia will be compounded further in future as climate change intensifies.

The IPCC report also suggests that by compounding the pressures on natural resources and the environment associated with rapid urbanization, industrialization, and economic development, climate change will impinge on sustainable development in most Asian countries.

This grim future Asian scenario, predicted with medium to high confidence, calls for urgent action to manage climate change impacts effectively and to undertake drastic mitigation activities. In this whole process, the UNFCCC principles of equity, common but differentiated responsibility, and respective capacities must be followed in assigning responsibilities to the countries of the world.

In this context, the EU's initiative of the Global Climate Change Alliance (GCCA) is indeed very welcome. It is an Alliance between the EU and poor developing countries vulnerable to climate change, particularly the LDCs and the SIDS, designed in particular to help increase their capacity to adapt to climate change and pursue sustainable development strategies. It is also a platform for dialogue in support of international negotiations for a just and binding post-2012 climate change agreement.

Within the framework of this initiative, Declarations have been signed on Climate Change and Energy between the EU and Cariforum in May 2008, on Climate Change between the EU and the Pacific Islands Forum States in November 2008, on Climate Change between the EU and Africa in December 2008, and on Climate Change and Development between the EU and ACP in May 2009. A technical group is appointed by the EU and the other countries signing a declaration to ensure appropriate follow-up action.

Bangladesh, a country most vulnerable to climate change, can benefit by subscribing to a mutually agreed declaration on climate change under the GCCA, and so can other developing countries of the Asia region facing severe climate change implications.

In the wake of climate change, Bangladesh is likely to face increasing risks to food security, energy security, water security, livelihood security, health security, and habitat security. Even without climate change, Bangladesh suffers from serious multiple stresses which make the country most vulnerable to climate change. These stresses arise from realities facing the country, which include:

- Severely disadvantaged geographical location at the bottom of three mighty river basins—the Ganges, the Brahmaputra, and the Meghna. The country has no control over its water resources as 92% of the annual run-off that flows through Bangladesh to the Bay of Bengal enters the country from upstream outside Bangladesh. The country faces too much water during the rainy season (June-October) and too little during the lean season (January-May), which pose different types of serious problems.
- A deltaic country with a long coastal belt and low-lying areas inland
- Mighty rivers of the country are subject to bank erosion as a consequence of strong flooding, displacing people and reducing agricultural land
- Highest population density in the world except for a few city and tiny states
- Poor primary health care systems
- High levels of and widespread poverty
- Lack of purposeful community and local resource mobilization through effective local governance

Superimposed on these stresses, natural disasters would undoubtedly play havoc. In fact, climate change-induced natural disasters have already started occurring. The country has begun to experience shifting and erratic rainfall, more frequent floods, cyclones and storm surges, and deeper salinity ingress. These are causing large-scale losses and damages in respect of the economic activity including crop production, livestock, and fishery; houses; physical assets; and economic and social infrastructure; and displacement of large numbers of people. With intensifying climate change, natural disasters are likely to be more frequent and devastating in future causing ever increasing sufferings to the people of the country. As a consequence, poverty will widen and deepen. Homelessness will burgeon. Large chunks of development funds will need to be shifted, as has already been happening, to relief and rehabilitation activities, adversely impacting on development prospects.

This slide can be contained through appropriate and effective adaptive activities; but not for very long if climate change keeps intensifying, and this is also true for other countries.

Therefore global temperature increase must be kept limited to less than 2⁰C through drastic mitigation activities undertaken without further loss of time, particularly by the developed countries with other countries doing their parts on the basis of the UNFCCC principles mentioned earlier.

The Government of Bangladesh has already adopted Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP). This has been internationally acclaimed as a major unique step taken by Bangladesh. The BCCSAP has been developed on certain basic principles, two of which are: to pursue an integrated approach to socio-economic development and climate change management; and to follow a low carbon path provided international financial and technological support is available and the country's need for accelerated economic growth and poverty reduction is not compromised. It focuses on six strategic areas: food security, social protection and health; comprehensive disaster management; infrastructure development; research and knowledge management; mitigation and low carbon development; and capacity building and institutional development.

Bangladesh's adaptive capacity is very limited due to institutional weaknesses, low human capability development, shortages of resources, lack of technological advancement, and absence of adequate data and analyses. Its capacity to undertake mitigation activities is even less, but it voluntarily wants to participate in the process.

The specific areas of support needed by Bangladesh include enhancement of adaptive capacity, implementation of strategic adaptive activities such as community approaches to disaster management, construction of Ganges barrage to improve water flows to southwest Bangladesh, and long-term forecasting of natural disasters; and, in relation to mitigation, transfer of technology in achieving energy security in a low carbon path and to derive benefits from potentials of, for example, clean development mechanism (CDM), reducing emissions from deforestation and forest degradation and role of conservation, sustainable management of forest, and enhancement of forest carbon stocks in developing countries (REDD+) initiatives.

The GCCA framework has the potential to support Bangladesh in these regards and in other relevant areas. Similarly, it can extend support to other interested Asian developing countries in relation to climate change management. But, the declarations must be carefully drafted,

reflecting the genuine perspectives and needs of the recipient countries and followed through with commitment by both the EU and the particular countries or groups of countries joining the GCCA. It may be mentioned here, though, that in the past, international commitments of developed countries have often remained short of delivery.

In concluding, let me say that I expect the EU will use its full weight, in combination with the voices of its GCCA and other partners and fortified by a commitment to saving the world from a looming catastrophe, to mobilize the support of all parties, particularly of those which matter the most for a legally binding equitable global agreement to be signed in Mexico for post-2012 climate change management. But, as I say this I am aware that there are formidable forces working against progress towards this goal. A key factor appears to be 'a crisis of values' among many world leaders, including several who matter the most. This is holding them back from facing squarely the looming climate change-induced catastrophe and acting to avert it. The question is: will they rise to the occasion and play their historic role?

Thank you all.