Disability: A neglected issue within climate change?

Maria Kett ,
Ellie Cole

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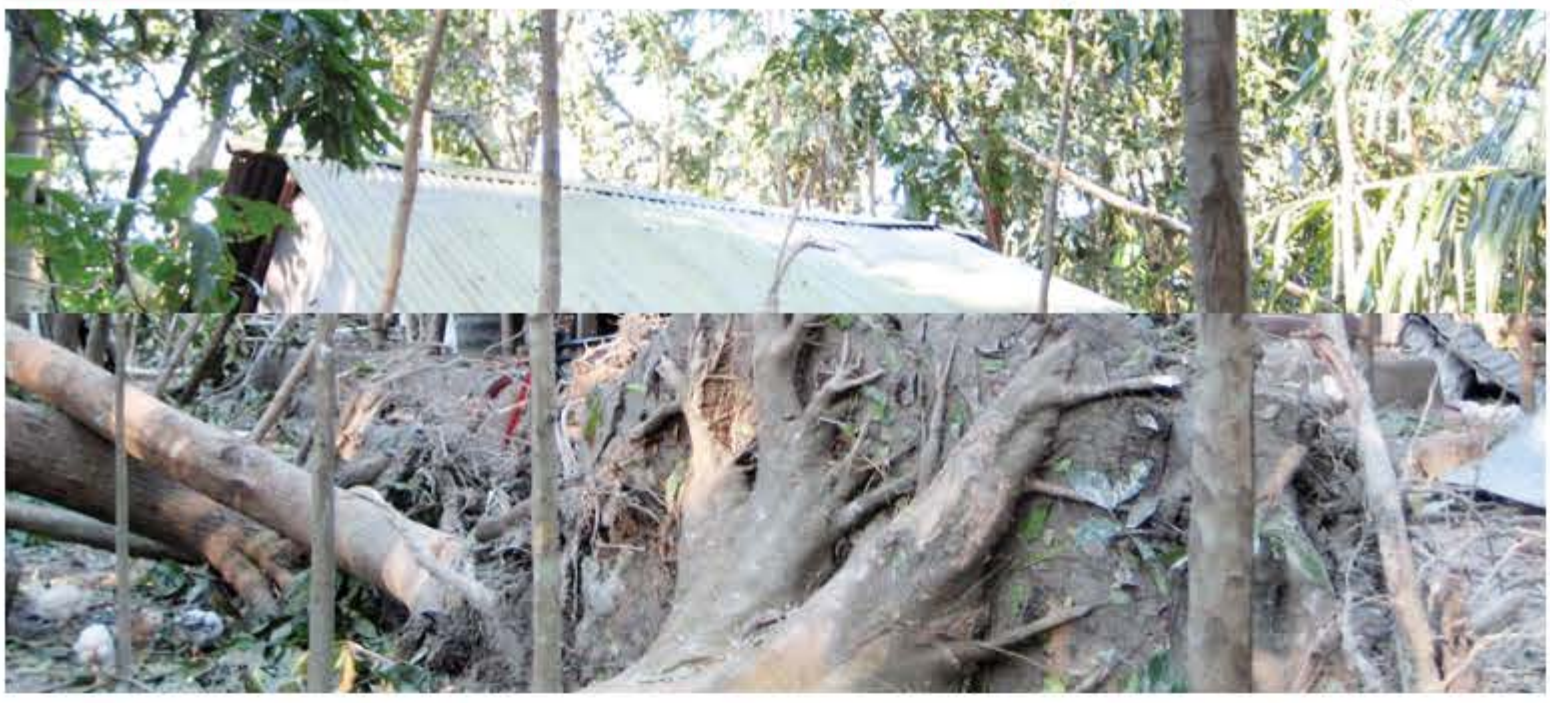

There is increasing evidence that even minor changes in global temperatures can have disabling health-related consequences. These include diseases from contaminated flood water, heat, or malnutrition. However, despite this focus, to date there has been little interest or discussion of the impacts of climate change on people who are already disabled.

A recent project undertaken by a team of researchers from the UK, Kenya, and Bangladesh, funded by the UK Government, aims to change this. This research looks at the extent to which persons with disabilities are affected by the changing climate, looking beyond health to examine impacts on a range of aspects, including livelihoods and the resilience of persons with disabilities to these impacts.

The risk factor

Many of the persons with disabilities interviewed for the research in both Bangladesh and Kenya pointed out that they are at as much risk, if not more, to the effects of climate change as everyone else in the communities, in part because they have less capacity to adapt. As one woman with disabilities in Barisal explained, their households experienced extensive damage because they could not adapt to the environmental changes:

"Due to river erosion [households]... lost all their assets including their land and agricultural assets like paddy land and vegetable lands. They had to get involved in micro-credit programs and in many cases they could not get themselves out of the complex micro-credit cycle; they ended up losing property in the process. They had to bear the loan for the whole year and face its consequences."

> It is increasingly clear that the impacts of climate change are affecting us all, and it is all of our responsibility to lessen these impacts, in particular on those who have the least capacity to withstand them

Other challenges that were highlighted by persons with disabilities was how they did not receive any training on alternative livelihood options, leaving them over-reliant on micro-credit loans. On the other hand, they also reported that they often face exclusion from formal finance structures, being refused loans and other financial support.

Another challenge is the extent to which they are included -- or can access -- the social protection and finance schemes set up to help people affected by disasters. They can become trapped in a cycle of dependency, as one man with disabilities in Kenya reported:

"Nobody has come forward to prepare us on what we should do to face the effects of climate change. Generally, it is an individual effort even for those with no disability. Floods are not new in this country; there are places that are always the worst hit year in year out. And in these places, people are depending on relief supplies."

In many communities in Bangladesh, persons with disability are often neglected or ignored within their communities. This in turn reduces the possibility that they will try to move away from disaster-prone or climate change-affected areas to seek alternative employment or improve their livelihoods.

While in both Kenya and Bangladesh there are policies in place to ensure inclusion and an increased focus on ensuring persons with disabilities are included in disaster preparedness and response, as well as funds to support people after a disaster -- these have not always been successfully put into practice, and there has been much less focus on the climatic aspects.

But providing support after a disaster is only one aspect. Given the increasing global environmental changes, communities and individuals need to increase their resilience to the impacts of climate change.

Resilience is key

So what can be done about this?

Though only a pilot project, our research has shown that merely having policies in place is not enough; they must be implemented effectively – otherwise, they will just remain on paper. It is also not enough to leave it to persons with disabilities themselves to ensure they are fully informed about the mitigation and adaptation work taking place, or about compensatory or insurance mechanisms on offer.

In many cases, they are excluded from these services or have no way of accessing information about them. More effort needs to be made to ensure that persons with disabilities are informed about programs and that they are accessible and available to them. To ensure that this is most effective, persons with disabilities should be consulted from the planning stages of the programs.

Nor is it enough to leave it to NGOs to ensure persons with disabilities are included.

Again, while the research identified pockets of good practice, these are by no means widespread, and it cannot be assumed that programs are including persons with disabilities effectively. Individuals and communities need to be informed and actively involved; they need to work with persons with disabilities and their organisations as well as other advocacy groups. This work needs to ensure that it focuses on persons with disabilities specifically, rather than just subsuming them within a list of "vulnerable groups."

Doing this runs the risk of rendering them invisible, and eventually neglected. Policymakers need to work across the range of sectors involved -- environment, agriculture, health, education, and social welfare, etc -- to ensure effective communication and information-sharing on disability-inclusive programming.

None of this is new, but from the research undertaken in Kenya and Bangladesh, many of the policies and programs designed to enhance resilience to-date have not effectively included persons with disabilities. This has to change.

There is currently much debate in Bangladesh about the extent to which communities should be recompensed for environmental-related loss and damage. To date, persons with disabilities have rarely been included in these discussions. It is important that policy makers, practitioners, advocates, and persons with disabilities themselves need to ask themselves why they are not at the table, and what needs to be done to ensure that they are in future.

It is increasingly clear that the impacts of climate change are affecting us all, and it is all of our responsibility to lessen these impacts, in particular on those who have the least capacity to withstand them. It is essential that persons with disabilities add their -- potentially powerful -- voices to the growing number of those speaking out about the impacts of climate change on the lives of people across the world.

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Social science research and the climate action challenge

Andrew Norton

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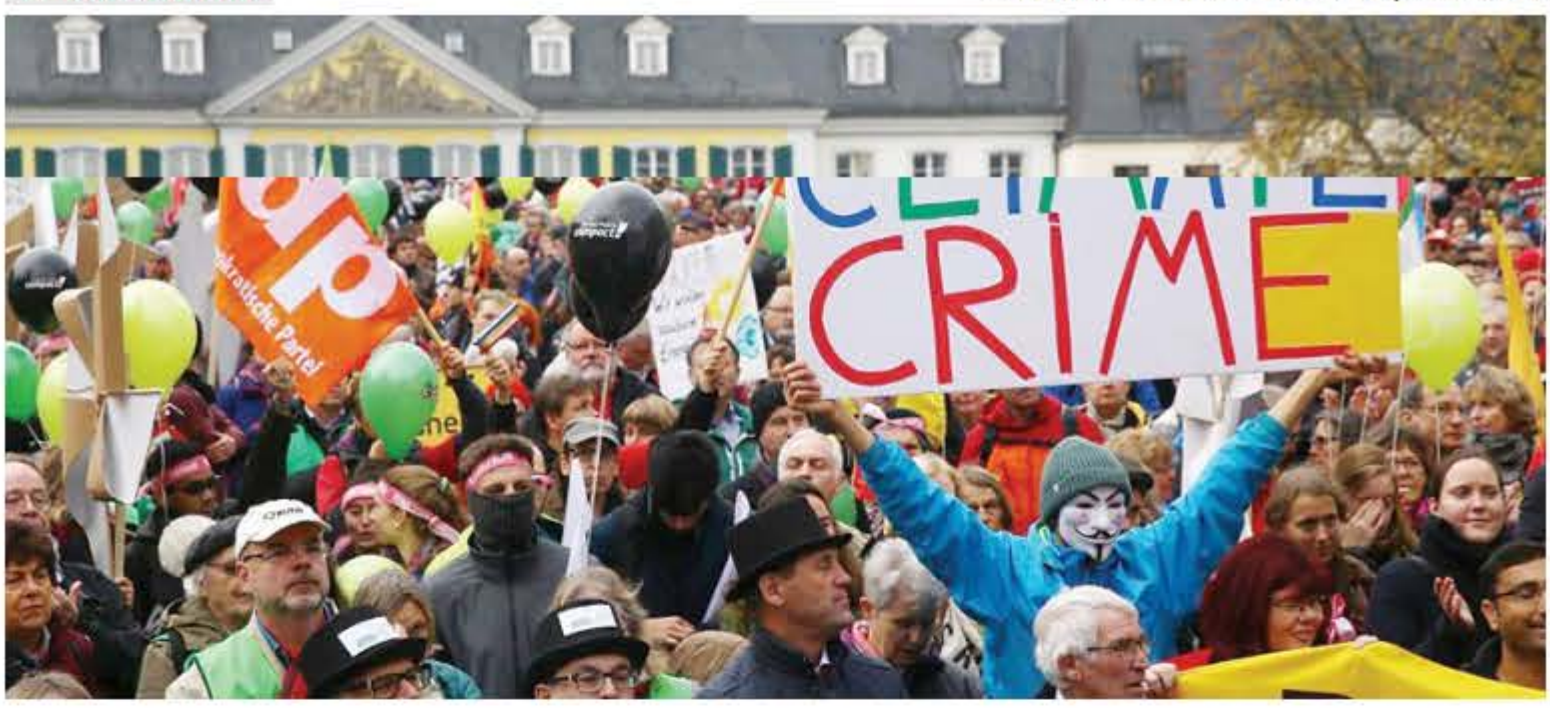

For those of us committed to a sustainable future, 2017 has been a challenging year.
A year ago there was a good deal of trepidation in the air about the election of President Trump in the US, and an apparently rising tide of xenophobic nationalism in much of the world. Nationalism tends to be bad news for climate action, as it undermines the multilateral spirit needed to tackle global challenges like climate change.
President Trump's announcement of his intention to withdraw the US from the Paris Agreement on Climate Change duly followed --and raised concerns in advance of climate talks in November.
Progress at COP23 was a mixed picture but could certainly have been worse. Fiji deserves credit for strong leadership. And the swell of support for climate action from US States, cities, businesses and civil society evident throughout was heartening --and a stunning rebuke to the climate denier President.
Two key processes for 2018 will be the finalising of the rule-book for the Paris Agreement, and the Talanoa Dialogue which must drive increased ambition to reduce Greenhouse Gas emissions.
Increased ambition is certainly needed because action to tackle climate change is nowhere near where it needs to be.

A global concern

In the wake of 2017's epidemic of extreme weather the supposedly "safe"upper goal for planetary warming of 2 degrees Celsius looks anything but. Aside from extreme weather, recent research suggests that more than a quarter of the planet's surface could become significantly drier at 2C. All of this reinforces the case for the more ambitious Paris goal of limiting warming to 1.5C.
But we are a long way off the pace. If all of the national climate action plans of all the countries on which the Paris Agreement's hopes of mitigating climate change are based were perfectly executed, then we would still likely be headed for 3C of warming by 2100.
The combination of these powerful driving forces --growing appreciation of the implications of global warming in the here and now, and appreciation of just how far current climate action plans fall short of the level of ambition we need --is likely to drive a more polarised and urgent debate on climate action in 2018.
We can expect to see on the one hand growing social activism to push business and government leaders to take urgent action. This will include increasing use of climate litigation as a weapon to take on vested interests.
Legal action targeting both governments and fossil fuel companies will be boosted by continuing developments in "attribution science »--the ability of scientists to establish the degree to which specific harm (in particular from extreme weather events) is caused by climate change.
On the other hand, the debate about climate geoengineering is bound to become more intense --with a broader focus including solar radiation management as well as carbon-dioxide removal. It is urgent that we get a better understanding of the potential impacts on poorer countries and the climate vulnerable, and seek to boost their voice in the growing debate about the governance of research into such technologies.

> Climate service information should be accessible, timely, and relevant to decision-maker needs in order to help societies cope with current climate variability and build resilience to future change

Technological advances will continue to make renewable energy a cheaper and more attractive proposition, with improved battery storage a key dimension. But less benign technical disruption may occur too. Emerging data on the energy demands of some crypto-currencies,particularly Bitcoin, are staggering. The growth of these mediums of exchange could eat up any energy efficiency gains the world is making in other areas, which is worrying.

Priorities for social science research

Given this context where can social science research in the Global South make a difference? Here are four suggested areas.
1.Action research on effective climate finance and getting "money where it matters
Research by IIED has demonstrated that less than ten per cent of climate finance from multilateral funds is intended to reach local institutions where it can make a difference to climate vulnerable communities.Not all climate finance should be targeted at this level –there is a rationale for spending on adaptation infrastructure as well as to leverage investment in climate change mitigation. But clearly not enough is reaching the sharp end of the harm that climate change causes. Action research which demonstrates how this can be done effectively is an important priority.
2. Documenting the human impacts, including complex social and behavioural responses
In some contexts, the connection between climate change and displacement is brutally obvious --as with sea level rise and low lying coastal areas. No country in the world has more of its population exposed to displacement from sea level rise than Bangladesh.
Other processes are more subtle and the linkages to behaviour less direct. How do uncertainties in the natural environment affect the incentives that people experience to invest in their land, or the ways in which they plan their lives? How do these uncertainties affect different groups in the population --men and women, farmers, pastoralists or fishers?
Addressing the policy challenges imaginatively but in ways which are grounded in a good understanding of context will also be critical. Dr Saleemul Huq has pointed out that Dhaka (or other megacities) will not be able to absorb all of the people who will be on the move as a result of climate change and other drivers. There is an urgent policy agenda to help secondary towns to plan for absorbing some of the influx, and to help those locations to develop resilient economies and societies (including labour markets) in the face of climate impacts.
Social scientists also have a role in making the human case for climate action on a global scale and communicating that to publics everywhere. It is a truism and perhaps becoming a cliché, that the poorest people in the world who did least to create the problem, are most vulnerable to the effects of climate change.
But we must not stop repeating it or finding ways to communicate the reality to publics worldwide – including in the rich countries that bear most of the historic responsibility.
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Icon of global warming. Earth, temperature, sun. Ecology concept. Can be used for topics like catastrophe, climate change, global problems[/caption]
3. Understanding distributional impacts of emerging technological developments
The debate about climate geoengineering is likely to get intense in 2018. What could be good --the promise of ways to either cool the planet through enhancing the reflection of sunlight, or to remove CO2 from the atmosphere thereby reducing global warming --could also be terrible. Particularly if banking on hypothetical solutions from unproven technology reduces the urgency of efforts to stop putting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere.
What is clear is that none of the techno-solutions under consideration will have equitable impacts between rich and poor nations, between powerful and powerless people.
The social justice implications are massive.
The bio-energy with carbon capture approach, if deployed at scale, could threaten food production and nutrition --and pose threats to poor communities' ability to retain land and natural resource rights. Sunlight reflection methods are highly uncertain with potentially alarming geopolitical considerations for countries without the power and wealth to be in the driving seat.
It is an area of work that calls for genuinely inter-disciplinary approaches. In terms of the potential social, political and human impacts of the technologies any serious work will need to combine rigorous scientific and social science analysis. And the political economy of governing practical research is also challenging.
The great conundrum of geo-engineering can be formulated as follows: the failures of global governance (i.e. to mitigate climate change) which are prompting interest in geoengineering, make it incredibly dangerous to proceed with it in practice. But those same weaknesses also mean it may be impossible to stop. Policy and research communities in the Global South will need to be engaged.
There are many other aspects of technological change which will need careful engagement by social science and social policy researchers. For example, as the coal industry is phased out jobs are put at risk --generally on a small scale in rich countries but often on a much larger scale in middle income countries.
Ensuring a "just transition" means finding ways of helping communities transition out of dying industries. Effective processes and policies to support that will be vital to keep green transitions on track politically.
4. Inclusive, sustainable urban development
The majority of urban population growth in the next decades will be in the poorest countries. Shaping this growth in ways that will be green and low carbon is immensely important as it is easier to guide and shape than to reshape a badly formed mess after the fact.
And inclusive and sustainable development will not be achieved without inclusive and sustainable cities. In countries with relatively low capacity to shape such development this is a significant challenge.

Making it count

It is clear that many of the urgent priorities for research to support effective climate action – in a range of fields including science and law as well as social science --will need to be driven from the Global South.
Improving our ability to communicate between research communities globally (south-south as well as south-north) will be essential. It will be vital to share our experience on making our analysis and research count in practice as well as the more technical aspects of our work.
IIED is very proud to have worked with our partners in Bangladesh (the International University of Bangladesh and the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies) to foster the development of a genuinely world class institution here in Dhaka --the International Centre for Climate Change and Development, organisers of this Gobeshona Conference.
We look forward to continuing to work to develop the capacity and relationships needed to drive transformational change. Such an effort has never been more urgent and more important than it is now.

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Creating climate services in Bangladesh

Melody Braun , John Furlow

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As we recently passed the second anniversary of the adoption of the Paris Agreement at COP21, we have seen leadership on climate action accelerating.

Governments have been increasingly joined by states, cities, the private sector, while the civil society maintains a continuous pressure on their elected leaders. Universities are joining forces around the world to foster capacity building and climate education for the younger generation.

However, the level of ambition remains insufficient, and developing countries are facing two challenges: improving the productivity of their agricultural sector and diversifying their economies, while managing a number of growing additional stresses and constraints, including climate variability and change. Each sector is facing its share of climate impacts, and is mobilizing efforts and funding to respond to it.

With the broad agreement that countries need to adapt, funds are made increasingly available from multiple sources. But a major challenge to adaptation is the gap between climate scientists and the rest of the world.

On the one hand, a great deal of climate information is constantly generated at global, national and subnational scales by climate scientists and national meteorological services, but is often disconnected from concrete applications, and not available at a useful timescale to support decisions that are being made. Of course, tremendous efforts are invested on the ground by agricultural extension officers, NGOs, private sector, donors to better anticipate, adapt and react to climate impacts, but rarely take advantage of the best information available.

Applying appropriate information to the most pressing challenges is a difficult but vital task. Information on the climate expected at the end of the century is useful for some infrastructure projects, but not for farmers trying to make decision for the next growing season. Users and producers of information need to communicate their needs and abilities to each other so that the best information is used for the best outcomes.

> Climate service information should be accessible, timely, and relevant to decision-maker needs in order to help societies cope with current climate variability and build resilience to future change

What is often missing is a body or platform to help connect two communities that speak different languages. Just like in a multidisciplinary or multicultural environment, each group needs to understand in their own terms how the others think, what they can do, what their needs are and how to best complement each other. The concept of "climate services" seeks to address this information challenge. According to Climate Services Partnership, climate services "involve the production, translation, transfer, and use of climate knowledge and information in climate-informed decision making and climate-smart policy and planning. Climate services ensure that the best available climate science is effectively communicated with agriculture, water, health, and other sectors, to develop and evaluate adaptation strategies."

Climate service information should be accessible, timely, and relevant to decision-maker needs in order to help societies cope with current climate variability and build resilience to future change.There are four components of climate services, and together they provide: A voice for the users of information to define what information will be useful and in which format; a responsibility for high quality information; a mandate to translate that information into terms that decision makers can understand and use; and, a call for effective communication of information to users.

Ideally, an effort to enhance climate services will create working relationships between information providers -- weather agencies -- and information users in agriculture, fishing, transportation, energy, construction, etc.

Bangladesh has a talented meteorological service (the Bangladesh Meteorological Department, BMD), is clearly at risk of climate impacts, and is running up a steep learning curve on adaptation. BMD faces greater demand for support than it has the capacity to provide.

To meet this demand and bridge this gap between climate scientists and decision makers, BMD together with the International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), the Independent University of Bangladesh (IUB), CIMMYT Bangladesh which leads the Climate Services for Rural Development (CSRD) project, and the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) at Columbia University, which leads the Adapting Agriculture to Climate Today for Tomorrow (ACToday) project, are jointly establishing a climate services academy.

The climate services academy is intended to become a dynamic, participatory platform to centralize and coordinate efforts on climate services, that brings together multiple actors and sectors, with various levels of knowledge on climate information.

It will be established as a sub-group of the Bangladesh research Gobeshona umbrella, and as such it will be hosted at the Independent University of Bangladesh. The academy will fill a number of functions, to be shaped by priorities and interests of its members. It can host professional training courses for staff at BMD and certification programs for cross-sectoral training in climate science.

It can facilitate discussions between users and producers of weather and climate information. The academy can help identify specific information needs in specific sectors, and how to best tailor that information to support implementation of Bangladesh's national adaptation plan and other development strategies.

It can facilitate the co-creation of tools to help decision makers understand and manage risk. It can host tools like the Columbia University's Data Library, a versatile dynamic online data management system. It can provide a climate science curriculum for a new generation of Bangladeshi experts in climate change adaptation.

The climate services academy was presented and discussed in a Symposium on Climate Services in Bangladesh at the Gobeshona conference 2018, on January 10th. Next steps will be based upon the outcomes of the discussion.

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Pathways to a low-carbon, hunger-free Bangladesh

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Bangladesh has made impressive strides towards achieving food security, with the ultimate Sustainable Development Goal being zero hunger. But the gains are fragile. Food security, especially for the poorest people in the most vulnerable parts of the country, is precarious. Soil fertility is in jeopardy. Agriculture and the people who rely on it face daunting obstacles which climate change is exacerbating, including droughts and floods, steadily rising temperatures and changes to the seasons. Once national food security is achieved, the challenge of sustaining it in the face of climate change will be daunting.

Bangladesh is already recognised as an international leader on climate change adaptation but under the Paris Agreement, it is also committed to playing its part in keeping its greenhouse gas emissions as low as possible as it develops. The ultimate global goal is for a world with net zero carbon emissions. As some 40% of Bangladeshi emissions come from agriculture, mainly via the powerful greenhouse gases methane and nitrous oxide, the issue of how those emissions can be minimised as food production is improved and rural livelihoods enhanced, is becoming of great interest.

Can the country's ambition to achieve food security be delivered in ways that also help to achieve a lower carbon economy? If so, how? Is it possible that agricultural practices that result in fewer greenhouse gas emissions could make agriculture more productive, profitable and sustainable - a positive feedback loop? Or, will there be conflicts and trade-offs between the goals of more and better food with a lower carbon footprint? And how does this fit into the wider context in which Bangladesh is aiming to increase its energy use to achieve electricity for all, but doing this primarily through the increased use of coal that will increase climate change?

> As some 40% of Bangladesh's emissions are of the powerful greenhouse gases and come from agriculture, can the drive for food security and sustainable food systems be delivered in ways that also cut emissions?

Fortunately, many ways to make agriculture more productive, efficient and sustainable are also potentially excellent ways of reducing emissions. These include draining flooded rice fields when and where possible, modifying livestock diets, managing manures and changing or diversifying crops. The same measures can conserve water and help restore soil fertility.

In the near future it is also possible that climate finance will come into Bangladesh to fund practices to sequester carbon in soils and vegetation, either via the Green Climate Fund or for offsetting emissions in other countries. Such developments could set agriculture, and rural livelihoods, in new directions. Further challenges – and opportunities – are presented by changes in Bangladeshi diets towards more meat, milk, fish, fruit and vegetables which are crucial for improving nutrition.

However, new paths bring new risks; even sustainable agricultural methods may have risks attached. Changing agricultural practices may require new finance, new ways of working and living, new skills and knowledge and willingness and capacity to experiment. These raise social concerns. Who stands to benefit, and who decides what will be done and how? If changes are implemented in certain ways poor farmers and farm labourers could benefit and see production and wages rise, but if not, then they could finish up even poorer. And what happens to poor people in cities who are at the end of food chains?

In the broader context of national development, how can the circle be squared that people need electricity, and better energy sources for cooking, but despite Bangladesh's well-earned reputation as a solar leader, and the need for global coal phase-out by 2050, the country is banking on coal as the main way to meet energy demand? On the other hand, utility-scale solar plants of the size being built in, for example, India, could run the risk of competing for scarce agricultural land.

Food commitments and climate commitments, developments in agriculture and energy, raise the question, what sort of future do people want? What might – ideally – Bangladesh look like in 10 or 20 or more years? Seemingly contradictory aspects of national policies and potential social impacts raise the issue: how do societies discuss the ways forward? How do they identify paths that will help to achieve the dual goals of more and better food and lower emissions? How do they identify potential co-benefits on the one hand, and possible conflicts and places where there will have to be trade-offs on the other? And in that process, whose voices will be heard and whose interests will be represented in these decisions? Who gets to decide? There is always the risk that the people who are poor and most vulnerable to shocks to their livelihoods and to climatic hazards, will find themselves effectively excluded from the debate.

Three organisations have banded together to pilot a way for people to develop these discussions in Bangladesh. They are the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), based at the Independent University of Bangladesh, Dhaka; Oxfam, the development agency that has worked in Bangladesh for nearly 50 years; and Oxford University's Environmental Change Institute.

They intend to use a method of enabling discussions about potential futures, and how to choose between them, called participative scenario developments. This "zero-zero" project, named after the twin goals of zero hunger and zero net emissions, is funded by the UK's Economic and Social Research Council and Department for International Development and runs for 15 months from September 2017.

Participatory scenarios development will involve parts of society that may be presently neglected in the decision-making process so that their voices are heard. Poor and marginalized people already most at risk from shocks and hazards have the most to gain or lose and must be at the heart of debates about co-benefits or trade-offs.

Dr Monika Zurek of Oxford University ECI said: "Participatory scenarios have been used very successfully to bring together different communities of stakeholders and experts to discuss the implications of plausible future developments and how to change or prepare for them.

"They are excellent ways to open up new ways of thinking about the future, question our beliefs about the future that determine decision making and for making connections between people and institutions who might not normally talk with each other.

"We hope this methodology can be adapted and used in many other countries facing similar dilemmas."

Dr Saleemul Huq of ICCCAD said: "The agricultural sector is both key to achieving zero hunger in Bangladesh and could help reduce our greenhouse gas emissions over the next few decades. This requires inventive thinking about how we, as a society, can achieve these two goals in harmony, and participatory scenarios could be a great tool for this."

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"Zero Hunger --Zero Emissions: Enabling the debate on how to feed the world whilst mitigating climate change"is led by Dr Monika Zurek, Oxford University ECI, with Dr Saleemul Huq, ICCCAD/Independent University of Bangladesh, and Dr Irene Guijt, Oxfam GB. It is funded by UK ESRC and DfID.

‘Climate change is a matter of survival’

Meraz Mostofa

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As a country relatively weak on the global stage, but also one of the forefront victims of climate change, she asked in her research: How has Bangladesh managed to make its voice heard at all? Recently having defended her thesis titled “Weak Power in Action: Bangladesh Climate Diplomacy,”Dr Alice Baillat now returns to Bangladesh to present the keynote speech at the fourth annual Gobeshona conference on climate change.
Below is condensed version of an interview highlighting some of the findings of her work.

So what do you mean when you say Bangladesh is a “weak power climate leader”?

Well, we know that during the international climate negotiations, there is an imbalance in terms of power relations. Stronger parties [like the United States or the EU] are usually more able to defend their interests above weaker parties like Bangladesh.
At the same time, this is not a way to say that the weak parties don’t have any tools on hand to defend their interests. I have analysed in my PhD thesis the kind of strategies and tools Bangladesh uses to defend its interests in climate negotiations. I have developed the concept of weak power to qualify Bangladesh’s climate policy and diplomacy.
I define “weak power”as the capacity of a weak actor to transform its vulnerability into a comparative advantage and a diplomatic tool to increase its influence on negotiation processes. Because Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world, it has developed forward-looking policy initiatives in the field of adaptation, and is now recognised as a champion in the adaptation field.

> Vulnerable countries have a bigger role to play to pave the way for more ambitious climate action in future. Because climate change is a matter of survival for

While vulnerability is often seen as an handicap, it is also a fertile ground for innovation and experimentation.

What are some of the strategies a weak power like Bangladesh has used at the climate negotiations?

Given the country is recognised as both one of the most vulnerable to climate change, but has also contributed very little to global greenhouse gas emissions, it gives Bangladesh moral leadership in climate negotiations.
This moral leadership is an asset for putting pressure on industrialised countries to consider special needs and vulnerabilities of LDCs. But the effect of this moral leadership is more symbolic than real: It has given stronger visibility to vulnerable countries like Bangladesh, but it remains insufficient to convince developed countries to fulfill their financial promises.
Another important strategy for LDCs is to build coalitions in order to bypass certain barriers to their effective participation in negotiations and to increase their collective influence. Some of them come, for instance, with very tiny delegations, sometimes with only one or two delegates and so, they cannot attend all negotiation sessions.

Most of them lack expertise on very technical issues at stake in negotiations. So building coalitions is a way to overcome these obstacles by sharing human and scientific resources. And their voice becomes also stronger if they defend a common position.
We can observe this with the Climate Vulnerable Forum that has played a key role in providing a fresh momentum during the COP21 and beyond.
Weak parties can also borrow the resources they lack to exercise influence. For instance, they seek support from NGOs and experts to increase their expertise on adaptation and mitigation issues, but also to better understand the negotiation process that is also very complex and sometimes hard to follow for LDC negotiators.
Bangladesh has developed an extraordinary high level of expertise on adaptation thanks to some of its experts who are internationally recognised as scientific leaders in the field of adaptation. And also thanks to its vibrant NGO sector and community resilience.
This expertise is also part of the weak power, as it gives authority and legitimacy to the country on adaptation. But one limitation I see to this expertise in Bangladesh is that it is too concentrated in the hands of a dozen of experts. Who will replace Dr Saleemul Huq or Dr Atiq Rahman, for instance? Bangladesh has to invest in the education of next generations to ensure the continuity of this expertise on adaptation.
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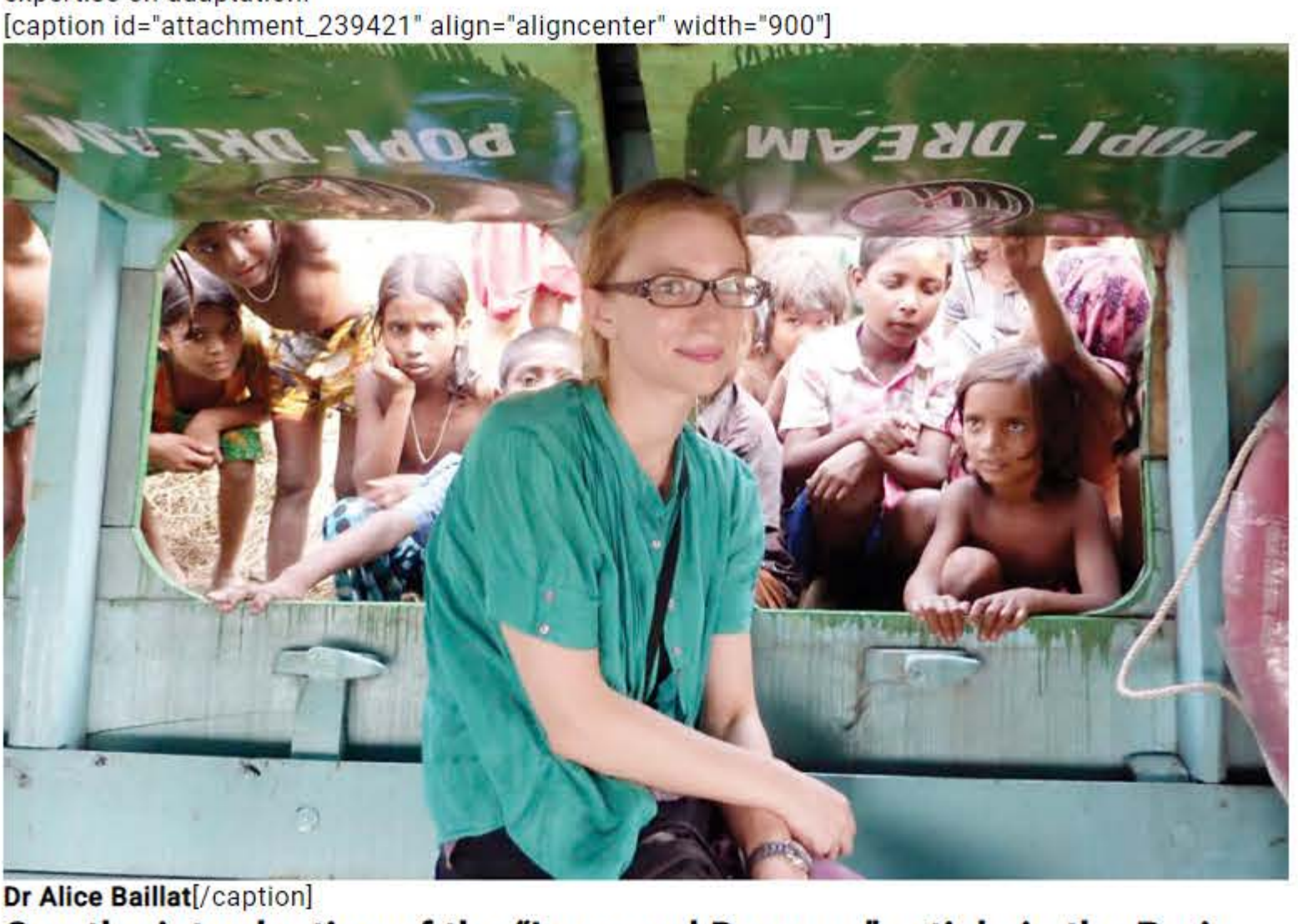

Dr Alice Baillat[/caption]

Can the introduction of the “Loss and Damage” article in the Paris Agreement be a successful example of weak power?

The inclusion of the “Loss and Damage” article in the Paris Agreement is a major collective achievement of the LDCs. And Bangladesh has been a key designer and promoter of this issue in climate negotiations since the beginning.
Developed countries were initially reluctant to put this issue on the UNFCCC agenda, because they feared to open the doors to new financial claims from vulnerable countries. But those countries succeeded to get a standalone article on “Loss and Damage” in the Paris Agreement.
It is not a complete victory, because the article now needs to be implemented and we have seen little progress on this in COP22 and COP23, but LDCs have managed to put this very important issue for them on the agenda, despite reluctances from stronger parties.
What I have observed is that LDCs can possess a weak power that helps to put issues important for them on the UNFCCC agenda. But this weak power remains, per definition, weak, and does not reverse asymmetrical nature of multilateral negotiations.
They can put new issues on the agenda, but they often fail to influence negotiation outcomes that remain a result of bargaining between stronger parties.

Does the fact that Bangladesh is planning to expand its fossil fuel infrastructure weaken its moral legitimacy at the international level?

Bangladesh has to give priority to its development, and of course its development has to be as clean as possible. Bangladesh is already investing a lot in renewable energies and has committed with other CVF countries to shift to 100% renewable energy by 2050. But this energy transition will take time and will require important investments.
So it is tempting for a country like Bangladesh, who legitimately wants to give priority to its economic growth, to look at cheaper sources of energy such as coal. And it is encouraged by countries such as China that sells its coal technology and expertise to developing countries and support power plant projects in countries like Bangladesh.

> One limitation I see in Bangladesh is that it is too concentrated in the hands of a dozen of experts. Who will replace Dr Saleemul Huq? Bangladesh has to invest in the education of next generations

This expansion of fossil fuel infrastructure does not weaken moral legitimacy of Bangladesh in my mind. The country is not responsible for global warming, and has the right to develop.
The problem, I think, is more that it is a wrong perception to think that Bangladesh will improve its future through a rapid economic growth based on fossil fuel energies. Because of Bangladesh’s vulnerability to climate change, adding more greenhouse gases to the atmosphere will lead to other hidden costs, such as health and environmental problems due to pollution.

In that sense, do you think there is an over-emphasis on climate change in Bangladesh, at least nationally? Given there are significant problems with governance and population growth.

Well, today in Bangladesh, climate change has become the cause of almost every environmental problem in the country, and there are also some environmental degradations in the country which are not the consequence of climate change but of, for example, wrong development decisions. So climate change can also be a very convenient scapegoat to ignore these wrong political decisions.
But weak power means also using all resources you have to defend your country'sinterests. And for a country like Bangladesh, it is essential to ask for international funding in order to develop adaptation and mitigation measures.
Highlighting the vulnerability of the country to climate change impacts, and its marginal responsibility in creating the climate problem, is a legitimate argument to ask for international support.
But it should not be a way to neglect the responsibility of the government.

In your view, how will the United States leaving the Paris Agreement impact the influence of “weak power”states?

Of course, the US withdrawing will have negative impacts for LDCs but also for the rest of the world. It undermines the universality of the Paris Agreement and impairs state’s confidence in climate cooperation.
It also reduces other countries’ emission space and raises their emission costs, making the achievement of the Paris Agreement’s objectives more difficult. And, of course, the US refusal to contribute to climate aid makes it more difficult for developing countries to mitigate and adapt to climate change.
But the withdrawal will not be effective before 2020, so we can still hope that the current US President will not be re-elected, and that his successor will reconsider Trump’s decision.
This withdrawal can also be a tremendous opportunity for vulnerable countries like Bangladesh to increase their leadership in the fight against climate change. The US has left a leadership vacuum. I am not sure that China really wants to fill this gap, and I don’t think that the European countries can play this role, especially in Brexit’s context.
So, vulnerable countries have a bigger role to play to pave the way for more ambitious climate action in future. Because climate change is a matter of survival for them, and because they are already at the forefront of implementing innovative solutions, they are probably the best guardians of the climate change regime.