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Climate Tribune



- **Do debt-burdens from climate finance fuel climate injustice?**

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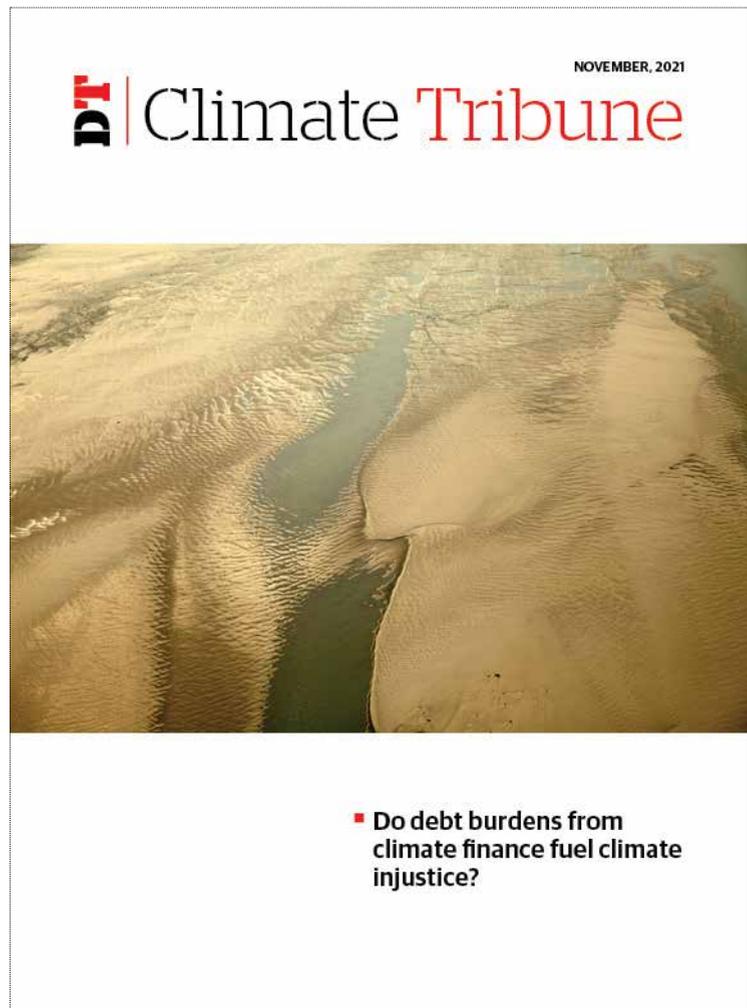


PHOTO: SYED ZAKIR HOSSAIN

'Climate change actions must be gender sensitive to address the existing inequality in the society'

INTERVIEW WITH ACTIONAID BANGLADESH COUNTRY DIRECTOR FARAH KABIR



Farah Kabir

COURTESY

Magnus Mayeen Ahmed

Farah Kabir, the Country Director for ActionAid Bangladesh (AAB), is one of the leading voices in the fight for climate justice in the country. In this interview, Kabir spoke about the work her organization does in relation to climate change, as well as on issues related to climate justice.

Can you give us a brief overview of what Climate Change related works ActionAid Bangladesh does in the country, and if this is among your main areas of focus?

ActionAid Bangladesh decided to prioritize climate justice back in 2008 when the organization realized that the issue was proving detrimental to its development and humanitarian response work.

It started from the perspective of disaster risk reduction

and disaster preparedness but then was swiftly moved on to resilience building, adaptation as a part of our project interventions and climate justice as a part of the advocacy at both national and global levels.

The organization does activism, campaigns, advocacy, and training, organizing dialogues and conferences. We also have strong communication and working relations with youth networks, women networks and South Asian networks.

As someone who has been working for climate justice for a long time, how do you define or how do you frame climate justice?

Climate Justice is about picking up equity-ness. We want people to understand how climate change affects different communities based on their gender, location, economic condition, or even political position.

Also now we unanimously agree that climate change has become a global crisis because of the development paradigm and approaches of the rich countries initially, and then the following of the same model by the developing countries of the south. So there is a responsibility agenda here.

We want to make sure there is differentiated responsibility and differentiated actions that need to be taken by different countries. We feel strongly that the commitment to keeping the emission levels below 1.5C should be at the centre of all the thinking and action. It is important wherever there is technology, knowledge and tools, it should be shared and not limited to only the rich because the impacts of climate change don't select anyone or leave anyone behind.

ActionAid Bangladesh is supporting the 'EarthWalk' campaign to rally up support and solidarity in order to push leaders to take action at COP26. What are your thoughts on this?

We are trying to take up different campaigns to make sure the agenda of climate justice remains on the table and the global leaders understand what the demands are.

Through the EarthWalk campaign, we want to rally up support, solidarity and put our demands in front of the global leadership at COP26. People from different countries, from the north to the south will be marching with the same demands.

What are some specific actions that ActionAid Bangladesh is taking to ensure climate justice for the most vulnerable communities?

Action Aid Bangladesh mainly focuses on the adaptation side as a solution for climate change impact. The organization is also doing some policy advocacy and campaigns. Supporting the communities to build up their resilience and listen to them and understand the indigenous knowledge they have and how to utilize them to address some of the climate change issues is another objective.

ActionAid Bangladesh has also been advocating for Gender justice as an essential ingredient of climate justice. The organization has represented Bangladesh in the sessions on Gender and Climate Change at multiple COPs. Since 2016 AAB has lobbied with the Bangladesh government and facilitated the coming together of non-government actors on this issue, leading to the engagement of relevant ministries as well as the PPPA recently.

We are actively making our demands to our political actors at the national level. As I said earlier, climate justice has been one of our agendas since 2008. We were there, involved

“ We want to make sure there is differentiated responsibility and differentiated actions that need to be taken by different countries. ”

in the advocacy for setting up a national fund, something Bangladesh celebrates in being one of the first countries in doing so.

Then we were involved in the national adaptation plan, and now in the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). In all of these areas, we are trying to take the learnings from the communities and put them at the table for the leaders to understand and formulate policies based on that.

What are the key aspects to work for or focus on in climate justice?

When we are working regarding climate justice, we want to make people understand there is an existing inequality in the society, infrastructure, institutions and systems. So when we now take any action or design any program it has to be gender sensitive.

It has to understand how climate change impacts women and girls, and how young people are losing out. If you constantly have to move, you basically become a climate refugee. These have traumatic impacts, which is why we want to keep talking about these issues with policymakers and also at the same time we want to find innovative ways to address them. It is not enough just to raise awareness. You have to give the people the information and tools to deal with it also.

Drawing from your experience and the work ActionAid Bangladesh has done, what do you think are the major hurdles in achieving climate justice?

The major hurdle is that the fossil fuel industry is very strong. They haven't worked or committed enough to realize the Paris Agreement. The emission level hasn't gone down. Then, the targets that have been set up speak of 2030 and 2050 but the world is already burning, already being flooded.

We have seen wildfires burning from California to Australia, which is why we need serious commitment. We need to ensure that the \$100 billion per year proposal actually materializes, and the money is used for adapting, mitigating and loss and damage.

Infrastructures won't sustain in the face of constant disasters. How will the private sector's factories and infrastructure survive? So there has to be vulnerability assessment, risk planning and anticipatory action for all stakeholders involved.

Do you think COP26 can play a crucial role in climate justice going forward?

We are all putting our hopes on COP26 but we also have to be realistic. There have been some good initiatives and there have been encouraging statements from different parts of the world but at the end of the day seeing is believing.

Once we see the action, the commitment, then next year I can tell you COP26 was a success. But for COP26 to be a success, they must have participation of women, young

“ It has to understand how climate change impacts women and girls, and how young people are losing out. If you constantly have to move, you basically become a climate refugee. ”

people and marginalized communities.

Given the long history of government inaction and avoidance, it may be too ambitious to expect too much from COP26. We want global leaders to come forward and say these are our commitments, these are our actions and they should be target-bound, time-bound; and clear monetary figures should be mentioned.

Having said that, this must be for the women, girls and young people because they are being affected the most, we all are being affected but their futures, in particular, are so uncertain. The planetary crisis has become an existential crisis. ■

Do debt-burdens from climate finance fuel climate injustice?

THIS PARADOX OF COUNTRIES LEAST RESPONSIBLE FOR CLIMATE CHANGE IMPACTS BEING THE MOST SUSCEPTIBLE TO IT IS WHAT THE CONCEPT OF CLIMATE JUSTICE ADDRESSES

Towrin Zaman Raya

The 48 countries in the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) - currently under the Bangladeshi presidency - are responsible for only 5% of the global greenhouse gas.

This statistic illustrates perfectly how little the climate-vulnerable countries contribute to the climate crisis they are now facing. The Global North has historically contributed a significant chunk of the global greenhouse gas emissions. But the countries from the Global South are the ones unjustly paying the price.

“Another failure of climate finance has been the inability to balance adaptation and mitigation finance, a primary aim of climate finance”



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This vulnerability results from environmental and geographical factors and existent social, economic, political, and cultural dynamics. Moreover, this vulnerability is not equally distributed even within those climate-vulnerable countries. The marginalized and low-income groups are disproportionately affected by climate change impacts, despite having contributed the least to its causes.

This paradox of countries least responsible for climate change impacts being the most susceptible to it is what the concept of climate justice addresses. In fact, experts will say that to know climate justice, one has to be aware of climate injustice.

Climate finance as a response to climate injustice

Climate finance and climate justice are closely linked. Climate finance emerged as somewhat of a response to historical climate injustice. The politics of climate finance is framed around the fact that the Global North, having contributed most to climate change impacts, has the responsibility to provide finances for it.

Adaptation finance, in particular, is considered an efficient tool in increasing justice through the redistribution of resources from the Global North to the Global South. It could also be said that the failure of the Global North to live up to its commitment of paying \$100 billion per year to the Global South - as per the Paris Agreement - is a failure of delivering climate justice itself.

Another failure of climate finance has been the inability to balance adaptation and mitigation finance, a primary aim of climate finance. According to OCED, in 2019, only \$20 billion was spent for adaptation finance, less than half of that for mitigation.

Bias for mitigation finance

The figures suggest there is a growing bias among donors for providing mitigation finance only. A reason for this is the clear and quantifiable indicator of their success - reduction in greenhouse gas emissions.

Another factor is the return on investments easily earned from mitigation projects, whether for solar energy or electric vehicles. Adaptation projects on the other hand have no clear indicators for measuring their success, but usually, no money is generated. That makes it easy to provide mitigation finance mainly as loans. At the same time, adaptation funds are provided as mostly grants, which is not preferable for donors.

The bias towards mitigation is proportional to bias towards loans. Climate finance offered by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OCED) is mainly in loans. OCED reports that between 2013 and 2018, two-thirds of public climate finance were delivered as forms of debt instruments at high-interest rates.

“The politics of climate finance is framed around the fact that the Global North, having contributed most to climate change impacts, has the responsibility to provide finances for it”

Does climate finance create debt traps?

The high-interest rates reflect the inherent risk of investing in climate adaptation. Such investments are not meant to generate returns but instead focused on reducing future loss and damage. Adding to this, insufficient support from the international community forces the climate-vulnerable countries to resort to raising funds through global capital markets. Private creditors factor climate vulnerability into determining the interest rate and charge higher rates for the more climate-vulnerable countries. Debt traps are being created as a result.

Climate debt traps are created when new forms of climate crisis occur before countries can repay the loans they were provided to tackle previous climate crises. With the increasing frequency of climate change impacts leading to extreme events, the climate debt trap has become a reality for many countries. The debt burden is higher for the low-income countries, which are also among the most climate-vulnerable. Such debt traps are manifestations of climate injustice, considering how the developing countries have an all but negligible contribution to the global carbon emissions.

The increasing trends of climate finance in the forms of debts add to the unsustainable debt of Global South countries and create profits for the creditors in the Global North. As a result, climate finance, instead of serving its purpose of addressing the historic climate change impacts triggered by the Global North countries, is now exacerbating the burden. Thus, climate vulnerability impacts the debt sustainability of the nations by influencing the loans' costs and the increasing costs of recovery from climate-change induced loss and damage.

Global North providing climate finance in the form of loans and creating debt traps for the Global South is considered the height of irony by many because they historically owe a climate debt to the Global South because of their disproportionate and significant contribution to climate change impacts.

Loss and damage as the way forward

Climate finance becomes counter-productive if it leads to debt burdens for its recipients instead of helping them recover. That is why the increasing trend of loans as a form of climate change should be discouraged. The developing countries are now strongly advocating for financing loss and damage to counter this. This is backed by their claims that because the developed countries are the most significant contributors to global greenhouse gas emissions, compensation should come from them.

Financing loss and damage will ensure that climate finance provides funds to the climate-vulnerable countries and redistributes the finances from the Global North to the Global South. In this way, loss and damage will be instrumental in delivering climate justice.

Since loss and damage disproportionately affect women and minority groups more, climate finance should also be framed to respond to such inequalities. Otherwise, it would contribute to climate injustice.

For instance, loans being provided as climate finance will only add to the burdens of women and other minorities. Climate finance should be redistributive, gender-responsive and address loss and damages without debt instruments, in order to achieve climate justice. ■

“ Financing loss and damage will ensure that climate finance provides funds to the climate-vulnerable countries and redistributes the finances from the Global North to the Global South ”

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What is climate justice and can social innovation help?

GROWING SOCIAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL INJUSTICES AROUND THE WORLD ARE BEING AMPLIFIED BY CLIMATE CHANGE

Rukhsar Sultana

Over the years our failure to ensure an equitable and climate-just world, makes us wonder how we can redesign the system to be more robust to address the climate crisis?

Growing social and environmental injustices around the world are being amplified by climate change. Different groups and communities of developing countries, especially in the global south, are being disproportionately exposed to rising seas, extreme weather, and a warming planet. Climate Justice is crucial to address the problem at hand. Moreover, our historically constituted global economic system and governance give rise to these inequalities. The US Environmental Protection Agency defines climate justice as “The fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, colour, national origin, or income with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies.”.

Climate Justice has been underpinned since 2000 during COP6. COP or Conference of Parties is a supreme body of the UNFCCC and has been negotiating to approach climate justice since then. Later in 2002, the Bali Principles of Climate Justice were developed by a coalition for the Earth Summit in Bali. The principles articulated the human rights and environmental justice perspective, expanding on to the impacts and/or justice regarding the effects of responses to climate change. While climate justice has been discussed over several COPs since then, pledges have not transformed into action. As the whole world turns its attention towards Glasgow to deliver, the legitimacy of COP can be seriously jeopardized if environmental, academic, climate justice,

“To fully unlock the potential of social innovation and to ensure climate justice, each community requires action, not only from civil society but from local, national, and international governments as well”

indigenous and women rights and demands are not reflected in the outcomes from the negotiations at COP26.

Our leaders need to listen to the plight of the people and take actions backed by science for communities to have faith and belief restored on the UNFCCC pledge and review framework. The current strategies to combat climate change reflect the technological, commercial, and industrial dominance of market-led society, while people's behaviour is seen separately from these approaches. Thus, it is important to understand that technological innovation alone is insufficient to foster community cohesion, and/or deliver climate justice. Therefore, social innovation can play a pivotal role in this regard.

Social innovation is a functional idea put into practice (Bergman, et al. 2010) to develop and implement effective solutions to challenges, predominant structural issues of social, or environmental nature (Raja,2021). Innovation in this context relates to user-led innovation, driven by communities, and individuals, rather than government, business, or industry (Rohracher 2006, Bergman, et al. 2010). For a paradigm shift, we must rethink innovation in the context of sustainable development (Ravazzoli & Lopez, 2020). With a stronger focus on research, policy, and practice in the domain of the bottom-up approach, social innovation could offer benefits to climate change mitigation and help with climate justice. The social approach in this context has the potential to solve climate injustices and promote societal wellbeing while contributing to community and citizens' empowerment.

To fully unlock the potential of social innovation and to ensure climate justice, each community requires action, not only from civil society but from local, national, and international governments as well. Opportunities, such as stable democratic government frameworks that support and aspire to develop just communities with an equality agenda, allow communities to take action. Through incentives and flourishing of civil society initiatives, communities are allowed to take up ownership. By communicating empowerment and inclusion narratives that inspire and reward active and engaged citizenship, communities can be supported in their fight against climate injustices. In this regard for a dramatic transformation to ensure an equitable and climate just world, social innovations need to happen across different sectors of society. ■

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Disclaimer: The issue presented, and thoughts expressed in the articles are of the authors, it does not necessarily represent the organization's mission and program priorities.



PIXABAY

Unpacking the principles of just transition in climate change

WHAT IS JUST TRANSITION AND WHY DOES IT MATTER?

“The Grand Sud region, the southern part of Madagascar has experienced back-to-back droughts during the 2017-2020 rainy seasons”

Afsara Binte Mirza

For decades now, climate change scholars have identified the unequal burden on the poorest and most vulnerable, caused by climate change, despite their minimal contribution to the issue. Unpacking the root causes of inequalities, and vulnerabilities help in advocating for climate justice as a suitable framework for policy on integrating social justice and climate action into post-Covid recovery pathways.

To move ahead with the recent ‘building back better’ agenda through a green recovery, the idea of just transition is earning popularity in the climate policy arena. The concept of ‘just transition’ was initiated through the Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration at COP24 in 2018, which was signed by 50 countries. This declaration highlighted the outcome of decarbonization policies on fossil fuel workers and their communities.

Furthermore, the ideology was initially acknowledged by labour unions and environmental justice groups who resided in marginalised communities and perceived the urgency to move away from industries that were damaging workers, community health and the planet; and simultaneously pave just pathways for workers to transition to other jobs. It is imperative to notice that low-income communities have been and are currently disproportionately being impacted by harmful pollution and industrial practices.

In this case, ‘just transition’ simply reflects on processes and practices that construct economic and political power to transfer from an extractive economic model to a regenerative one. Hence, production and consumption processes should be circular (ie, recycle, reduce, reuse). For instance, the European Union is aiming to assemble 65-75 billion euros under the ‘Just Transition Mechanism’ over the course of 2021-2027 to pave its way towards a climate-neutral economy. The transformation must be just and equitable for all, by redressing past harms and building new relations of power that are liberating. The Climate Justice Alliance has several principles that define just transition.

The first one is to move toward *Ben Vivir* which means that we all can live happily without living better at the expense of others. Just transition aims to value workers, community members, women, and indigenous people everywhere in the world who have a basic human right to clean, healthy and quality air, water, land, food, education and shelter. Additionally, we must have a respectful relationship with each other and the nature around us.

The second principle is to create meaningful work. This means a just transition is dependent on the nurturing of human potential, which creates the scope for people to thrive, grow, learn about their individual interests and capacities. Everyone has the potential to be a leader, and a regenerative economic model bolsters that.

The third principle is about upholding self-determination. Every human being has the right to take part in decisions that affect their lives. This entails democratic governance in communities and workplaces where frontline workers and the fenceline workers of the extractive economy can build their expertise to find solutions to their own problems by leadership.

While, the fourth principle equitably redistributes resources and power to fabricate new systems that continuously work against and transform existing and historic social inequalities based on race, class, gender, immigrant status and other forms of injustice. Just transitions work towards reclaiming capital and resources for the protection of vulnerable geographies and sectors of the economy where these inequalities are most prevalent.

The fifth principle highlights the regenerative ecological economics that safeguards nature and builds ecological resilience, minimizes resource consumptions, protects traditional lifestyles, and halt extractive economic activities, including capitalism. This will need a re-localization and democratization of primary production and consumption by increasing the local food system, local clean energy, and small-scale production that are sustainable economically and ecologically.

The sixth principle emphasizes the importance of protecting one's own culture and tradition. Capitalism leads to the undermining of culture and tradition for economic survival. Therefore, just transition should be inclusive and respect all traditions and cultures, making them a crucial part of a healthy and vibrant economy.

Nonetheless, the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic has been a wake-up call to focus more on the principles of Just transition than ever before. To tackle climate change more strategically, all countries, especially least developing countries should start making their way towards adopting the principles of just transition in their economic models. However, due to limited resources, finances, and technical know-hows, developed countries should give a hand to the LDCs to establish the principles of just transition.

For instance, the vulnerable people living in the southwestern part of Bangladesh, in Khulna District, Shayamnagar Upazila can be more climate resilient, if their basic fundamental rights such as access the clean drinking water and toilets, healthy food, easily accessible community clinics and schools are taken care of, which will ensure a beginning towards just transition. Similarly, the Munda community, an old indigenous group residing in this region are being impacted by slow onset events such as sea-level rise, saline intrusion, and river erosion which is undermining their health, education, food security and livelihood. In Naomi Klein's book 'This Changes Everything,' she emphasized acting on the objective of making sure that everyone has the fundamentals are taken care of: health care, education,

“ Just transition aims to value workers, community members, women, and indigenous people everywhere in the world who have a basic human right to clean, healthy and quality air, water, land, food, education and shelter ”

food, and clean water. She stressed that this will be a 'central strategy' to tackle climate change.

The loss and damage agenda should incorporate the principles of just transition to fabricate local, regional and national strategies that advocate taking into account the non-economic losses such as health and wellbeing, education, tradition and cultures, biodiversity, etc.

More importantly, the policymakers should make policies by consulting with diverse marginalized and local communities and respecting their intersectionality. Just transition principles should be incorporated into investment and financing criteria for climate finance to make sure that the finance reaches the most neglected communities first. ■

Afsara Mirza is working in the International Centre for Climate Change and Development as a Junior Research Officer.

NON-ECONOMIC LOSS AND DAMAGE

Non-economic loss and damage is the forgotten piece in climate change solution

IN RECOGNITION OF THE IMPORTANCE OF NON-ECONOMIC LOSSES, NELD HAS BEEN INCLUDED IN THE WORK PLAN OF THE WARSAW INTERNATIONAL MECHANISM AS A SPECIFIC WORK AREA OF THE UNFCCC



Fishermen at Valiathura beach are getting ready for their daily fish catch, while other community members enjoy the evening beauty of the beach.

LANGSCAPE MAGAZINE

Nusrat Naushin

As climate change unfolds, its impacts are prevalent in every sphere of life now. Marginalized, vulnerable, and poor people are particularly affected by climate change in various ways. Financial help may get them back on their feet, but it is not enough to truly remedy their suffering. The loss of lives, land, territory, language, and culture can't be valued in monetary terms. It is critically important to pay attention to this aspect of climate change-induced loss and damage.

The adverse impacts of climate change have been predicted for decades now, which are increasingly manifesting as heatwaves, floods, wildfires, and droughts.

Climate change is unequivocally human-induced and indisputably an issue of climate justice, associated with development failures and lack of sufficient mitigation and adaptation. Even though the Paris Agreement in 2015 has set out a global goal of limiting global temperature rise to 1.5C, today we are facing the brunt of increasing temperature, causing many extreme events that are wrecking people's lives.

While there are numerous ways to experience loss and damage from climate change, policymakers and researchers should focus on those that can be easily measured. However, it is often the less tangible or difficult-to-measure losses that can undermine and destroy entire societies and cultures.

Non-economic loss and damage (NELD), in a simple form, refers to the loss of values that are not commonly traded in markets. Examples include loss of, and damage to, mental health, culture, way of life, biodiversity, or social cohesion. The following are examples of key NELD terminologies:

Health and wellbeing refer to the overall wellbeing cost of climate change, particularly for vulnerable groups, which goes beyond the act of being physically fit.

Ways of being encapsulates the loss of non-tangible, value-based assets such as culture, heritage and language. This includes harm to the "way of life" and how people are tied to their surroundings, which not only affects the present actors but are likely to be felt across several generations.

Cultural sites and sacred places include losses to traditional and religious grounds such as burial and cultural sites. These have no standard value, but cultural beliefs are heavily intertwined with people's being.

Indigenous knowledge and local knowledge captures the use of flora and fauna as climate and weather indicators. The material manifestation of local knowledge such as fishing or planting techniques, cultural and social norms can heavily impact people's way of life when hit by adverse impacts of climate change.

Biodiversity and ecosystem services acknowledge that climate change will slowly modify ecosystems, and lots of species will no longer live in the same place, populations will move, disappear or change and ecosystem composition will be different.

These aspects of life are deeply entangled with the lives of the frontline communities, where it is impossible to value one at the expense of the other since all the factors are embedded in their way of life.

Loss and damage - those impacts that can no longer be avoided or reduced - is already upon us. High coral reef mortality due to rising sea-surface temperatures is one such example of how climate change may directly cause non-economic loss of biodiversity in the future.

Loss of territory due to sea-level rise presents another way in which climate change may lead to NELD. Examples of NELD include adverse impacts on human health following

““ Non-economic loss and damage (NELD), in a simple form, refers to the loss of values that are not commonly traded in markets. Examples include loss of, and damage to, mental health, culture, way of life, biodiversity, or social cohesion ””

the contamination of freshwater due to sea-level rise or heavy flooding.

Loss of sense of place, traditional knowledge or cultural identity is often an indirect consequence of climate change if migration is necessary for populations or individuals to safeguard their survival. Climate-induced displacement has direct implications for non-economic loss and damage, including threats to health and wellbeing and loss of culture and social ties.

“ In recognition of the importance of non-economic losses, NELD has been included in the work plan of the Warsaw International Mechanism as a specific work area of the UNFCCC ”

While there are tremendous economic losses due to climatic stress which need to be compensated financially, there are also losses that money cannot buy back.

In Bangladesh, every year, about a hundred houses are destroyed by riverbank erosion, which means that the already densely populated villages are now pushed together even closer. People might have the financial means to leave, but they sometimes choose not to.

Culture, traditions, social values, identity, and emotional attachment play an essential role in deciding to go or stay. Most people do not want to leave a place where their families have lived for generations and where they grew up and have memories of.

At the collective level, the disruption of informal networks due to migration can cause losses in the form of a population's diminished capacity to cope with continued climate impacts, further increasing the toll of climate change. It is essential to listen to people living in the frontline communities. Personal narratives help reveal the reality for people living on the frontlines of climate change; hence policy-makers need to listen to the affected communities and learn from them to know what support they need.

Once lost, intangible values cannot be adequately compensated. But action can be taken. Awareness-raising and capacity building of local communities is at the heart of adaptation and loss, and damage. In recognition of the importance of non-economic losses, NELD has been included in the work plan of the Warsaw International Mechanism as a specific work area of the UNFCCC.

Numerous literature on adequate assessment methods and participatory approaches to adaptation planning is available in this regard, including the integration of NELD into more comprehensive economic assessments and the drawbacks of such integration. Other strategies included biodiversity and ecosystem conservation and restoration and safeguarding Indigenous and local knowledge and supporting cultural continuity. Preserving intangible cultural heritage such as support networks and reciprocity are also crucial for resilience in the face of loss among vulnerable communities.

Unless proper assessment of non-economic loss and damages is taken into account, the world will not get an accurate picture of the impacts of climate change. Hence, it is pertinent for researchers and policy makers to mainstream such initiatives to address non-economic loss and damage in their regional and international development plan. ■

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Climate negotiations and climate justice: The politics behind

CLIMATE JUSTICE ENTAILS ENSURING THAT INDIVIDUALS AND THE ENVIRONMENT ARE TREATED EQUALLY IN COUNTRIES' ATTEMPTS TO MITIGATE SUBSEQUENT CLIMATE CHANGE, AND SHARING THE RESPONSIBILITIES OF CLIMATE CHANGE AND ITS RESOLUTION EQUITABLY AND FAIRLY

Farzana Shams Riya and Samina Islam

Climate change is undoubtedly one of the highest concerns that human social, political, and economic institutions have ever faced. The implications are massive, the dangers and uncertainties are significant, the politics are turbulent and confusing, the consequences are terrible, and the discussions with other environmental and non-environmental concerns are many.

Existing societal problem-solving processes were not developed, and evolved to deal with anything resembling an interrelated set of problems of this magnitude, scale, and complexity. So far, efforts to combat climate change throughout the world appear to have fallen well short of considering justice effectively.

Despite the fact that the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) document (1992), is



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“Least Developed Countries (LDCs), particularly those whose economies are based on agriculture, are the most susceptible to climate vulnerabilities”

full of the linguistics of justice, the majority of existing climate policy discussion has taken place on the basis of political hard and shrewd bargaining. Countries push each other to make specific commitments of future carbon emission reductions, and then try to negotiate an agreement based on assertions of reciprocity and side agreements such as trade deals and other incentives, leaving out the most affected countries in a helpless situation.

The 26th Conference of the Parties (COP), where each year negotiators representing the majority of countries across the world meet to agree on the global approach to fighting

climate change, is taking place at Glasgow from October 31 to November 12. The aim of each COP is to assess the progress made by countries around the world in tackling climate change; while 2021 is the first decision making COP which is widely considered to be the last chance to agree on policies that can get climate change under control before it is too late.

During COP21 in Paris in 2015, countries agreed on individual national targets to cut greenhouse gas emissions in order to meet the goal of limiting the temperature rise to 1.5C - known as ‘Nationally Determined Contributions’ (NDCs).

However, the NDCs set in 2015 are considered by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) to be far below the levels needed to meet the objective of the Paris Agreement. Therefore, it is expected to see countries agree to new and stronger NDCs that can achieve both net zero and keep global warming below the crucial 1.5C threshold.

But there are lots of other outcomes presumed - including making the preservation of natural habitats a priority, increasing efforts to stop deforestation, boosting investments in renewable energy and finding new and better ways to finance activities that can both prevent climate change and help the society adapt to rising temperatures.

While human activities contribute to climate change, and individuals are already experiencing the consequences, the burden of responsibility is not fairly distributed. Least Developed Countries (LDCs), particularly those whose economies are based on agriculture, are the most susceptible to climate vulnerabilities. Developed and industrialized countries are historically responsible for the majority of GHGs in the atmosphere and therefore bear the greatest obligations for adaptation and mitigation.

The adoption and implementation of the public policies required bringing about the behavioral changes of developed countries, but this has so far been quite difficult to achieve. In the same line, even though the behaviors that lead to climate change occur in one place, their effects are experienced throughout the world. These behaviours make effective policies difficult to implement since the catastrophe is primarily global, long term, and irreversible.

To address the problem, the paradigm of climate justice has developed, putting mitigation and adaptation as the focus point. Climate justice entails ensuring that individuals and the environment are treated equally in countries’ attempts to mitigate subsequent climate change, and sharing the responsibilities of climate change and its resolution equitably and fairly.

For a long time, the issue of climate justice has been perceived from a compensatory approach, which is based on the principle that individual’s rights should be respected, not infringed or damaged as a result of others’ activities; if this is not done, compensation must be made to those who have been affected. Compensatory justice entails compensating the victim in the same way that the damage was inflicted.

This platform allows developed countries to use climate funding to channel their higher levels of carbon emissions while ignoring the representation of vulnerable countries at climate conferences.

Furthermore, considering vulnerability has generally gotten more attention from a risk-hazard perspective, it has generally been discussed in climate conferences in terms of mitigation rather than adaptation. However, because of their vulnerability to environmental disasters as a result of their geographical position and disadvantaged economic, political, social, and environmental resources, LDCs and developing countries are often pushed to undertake both adaptation and mitigation.

Individual interests, morals, and ethics play a major role in international climate negotiations. Generally, climate conferences are examples of self-serving bias, in which nations haggle endlessly with one another since the burden for reducing global GHG emissions is regarded as unjust.

In this case, developing countries argue that developed countries, which began the industrial revolution beforehand, should bear the weight of global warming responsibilities. Developing countries also demand developed countries to provide technical and economic assistance for emission reduction, such as providing resource and technological support.

The UNFCCC asserts unequivocally that developed countries must offer technical and financial assistance to developing countries in order to save energy and reduce emissions, addressing moral and legal difficulties.

Unfortunately, several developed countries refuse to carry out their legal commitments for fear of jeopardizing their own interests, making the Convention's implementation problematic. Instead, developed countries contend that LDCs and developing countries should restrict their overall emissions in conformity with contemporary emission standards as part of the global economy and must share the responsibility for global climate change.

As a consequence, the negotiating countries must be prepared to make concessions in order to establish a successful agreement based on reasonable ethical principles. The Transitional Committee's design of the Green Climate Fund, which is mostly constituted of developing countries, may substantially increase the perception of justice in climate negotiations.

A country's strategic priorities must shift to environmental preferences, and a minimal share of emission reduction will no longer be considered fair. In relevant discussions, developed countries should take the lead in climate governance and demonstrate a commitment for collaboration and mutual trust.

Even if individuals are skeptical about existing institutions and their likely successors' ability to deal with climate in an equitable approach, working on climate justice is still

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worth considering. As the consequences are evident for all the countries, it is high time to collaborate with everyone regardless of their status and bring to a halt a massive climate catastrophe. ■

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What does climate justice mean to the communities on the ground?

BANGLADESH IS ONE OF THE BIGGEST EXAMPLES OF A COUNTRY SUFFERING FROM CLIMATE INJUSTICE



“Everybody is too busy writing to read, too busy publishing to debate” - Rutger Bregman’s quote in ‘Utopia for Realist’ is also applicable in the case of climate justice. Hundreds and thousands of documents will appear on your screen as soon as you search the term online, but you are sure to get a lower number of returns if you look for the voice of the victims of climate injustice.

The climate-vulnerable communities, the people on the ground are still left under the shadow of scientists, researchers, academia and of course the policymakers. In most cases, we think ‘global’ as soon as the term ‘climate justice’ comes up.

Bangladesh is one of the biggest examples of a country suffering from climate injustice. The country is at the top of the list of the most vulnerable countries, and it is paying the highest price in terms of climate change, despite being responsible for an insignificant share of the carbon dioxide emitted during the last fifty years. Injustice has been evident from the lack of accountability of the global polluters. It is a dire scenario where the global top emitters are moving far away from any sort of accountability and responsibilities regarding the commitments they made.

In a similar way, we are yet to focus on the injustice on the ground level and to highlight how the communities suffer from these injustices in their daily lives. The injustice is strongly rooted in unjust decision making, unjust models and systems, and unjust accountability on the ground in the context of climate change.

“See, we, the women, have hardly any scope to share our thoughts, our choices and preferences; neither at home nor outside,” says Mosammat Sufia Khatun, a community leader from the coastal area of Morrelganj, Bagerhat in Bangladesh.

“We have grown up in a culture and practice of ‘unjust’ decision making processes which have been almost ‘normal’ in our work and life. This situation has become worse in the context of climate change as we, the women, despite being affected disproportionately, have limited space when it comes to climate change adaptation planning and concrete action on the ground. Men usually make all the decisions - it is strongly embedded and rooted in our patriarchal society and reflected in our political culture,” she said. These unjust decision-making practices for climate action not only discriminate against the excluded groups in the society but also, in reverse, favour the power holders in achieving more gains, on the other hand.

Abdul Jalil, a smallholder farmer from Koyra Sadar union in Koyra sub-district, reveals both sides of the coin. “It’s not true that climate change hurt everyone. It benefitted a group

of people in the community. Who are they? The powerful and the wealthy.”

Since Aila in 2009, the embankment here has been breached several times and has been left unattended year after year. It gets damaged time and again; most people say because of cyclones and tidal surge; but Abdul Jalil reveals a hidden fact: “It’s because of us, it’s because of our greed. The powerful have capitalized on it and widened the areas for shrimp farming - sadly being backed by the support from local leaders and policymakers. In the midst of all this, we, the poor, have become poorer; the marginalized have become migrants.”

“This situation has become worse in the context of climate change as we, the women, despite being affected disproportionately, have limited space when it comes to climate change adaptation planning and concrete action on the ground”

He pointed out that the existing unjust system and practices contribute to the inequality between the losers and gainers at the grassroots level. Climate actions and finance, in most cases, are led by greedy people in positions of power, leaving the voice of the oppressed unheard. It is complete injustice that the climate-vulnerable communities on the ground have limited space to benefit from in the current

“ It is complete injustice that the climate-vulnerable communities on the ground have limited space to benefit from in the current structure and system, whereas the gainers or the powerful capitalize on social and power dynamics to influence the decision making in their favour ”

structure and system, whereas the gainers or the powerful capitalize on social and power dynamics to influence the decision making in their favour.

Interestingly, injustice includes different dynamics. As the embankment has been discussed earlier, let's shed some light on it from a different angle. It is evident that climate change has an impact on sea-level rise and the increasing intensity of cyclones. This causes high tidal surges breaching the embankments regularly. Over the decades, the community from the southwest coast in the country has been raising their voices for a single demand - 'We need the embankment, we don't need relief'.

However, the local development plan and national development plan do not take care of it, the NGOs still go with the traditional approach of relief and recovery, while the civil society also has become toothless in this regard - none of them has been brave enough to come out and support the agenda boldly. They prefer working in their comfort zones; not taking strict stances to challenge the people in power; dealing with surface-level agenda rather than engaging the root causes. So, the concern finally comes down to whom and how to raise the issue of climate justice.

Another one of the dynamics can be observed if the spotlight is put on a slightly upper level. "The mega project

of embankment construction is going on in my territory, but I do not know what the project is for, how it has been designed and who has been consulted," said Zonaidur Rahman, the Union Parishad Chairman of Godaipur Union in Paikgacha sub-district in December 2020 in response to a question about climate financing.

This is a common scenario in climate financing as the projects are being designed, developed, and implemented centrally by the ministries or departments where the local voices are hardly addressed. Such an unjust model of climate financing promotes the culture of depriving local voices, disrespecting traditional knowledge and culture and ultimately resulting in injustice on the ground. ■