

Resilience and prosperity under a changing climate

Saleemul Huq, Md Bodrud-Doza and Khandker Tarin Tahsin outline the progress in Bangladesh over the last 50 years in terms of climate resilience, highlighting areas for improvement and lessons that can be learned

Bangladesh, jeopardised by multiple environmental, economic and social hazards, is one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change. Despite having limited resources, it has made significant progress in reducing the loss of human life through improved early warning and forecasting systems, effective use of local governance structure, active involvement of community-based organisations, risk informed and evidence based policy formulation and effective implementation of the policies and strategies.

Bangladesh's progress is also reflected in its GDP. In 1971 growth rate was -5.48 per cent, increasing to 5.2 per cent in 2020. Bangladesh's per capita has increased from \$134 to \$2,064 between 1971 and 2020, which has had huge effects on society, reducing the percentage of the population below poverty line by 80 per cent.

Export earnings have increased since the 1980s, with a rise of around 80 per cent in the past decade thanks to the flourishing garment industry. Bangladesh is the

second largest clothing producer and has bloomed in pharmaceuticals, basic steel, cement and ceramic industries. The country has also enhanced public-private partnerships and has invested in the power sector, communication infrastructure and digitisation.

However, Bangladesh is predominantly an agrarian country and agriculture contributes 13.07 per cent to GDP, while industry contributes approximately 28.54 per cent and the services sector about 52.96 per cent. On the other hand, geophysical location, high population density, dependence upon agriculture, nature-based livelihoods and a lack of resources have made Bangladesh one of the countries most affected by climate change.

Although it has come a long way in managing natural hazards, the unpredictable and unprecedented effects of climate change may halt its economic aspirations. According to the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC), climate-induced disasters account for a 1.5 per cent loss in Bangladesh's GDP. In

2016 the World Bank reported the economic losses from climate change over the past 40 years to be \$12 billion. It is evident that development and climate change are inextricably interlinked. This should urge us to synergise climate and development policies to support adaptation and resilience of climate vulnerable communities.

In the last 50 years, despite all of its climatic hazards, Bangladesh has recorded impressive growth in food-grain, fish, poultry and meat production. In 2020, total food-grain production was recorded as 45.4 million metric tons, and Bangladesh now stands as the fourth largest rice producing country in the world. Furthermore, it has significantly improved in health, sanitation and life expectancy, as well as maternal and child mortality ratios.

Bangladesh has improved its gender disparities successfully, securing first position in gender equality among South Asian countries.

The country has made remarkable progress in integrating climate change and development plans, mainstreaming climate change adaptation measures in national development objectives and moving towards low-carbon, climate resilient development. Being proactive in global climate negotiations and addressing local climate issues has conferred the position of global leader in adaptation upon Bangladesh.

Climate change adaptation and developing resilience are constitutional obligations for Bangladesh. The country has embraced a number of policies, strategies and plans at national and international levels and adopted and ratified all three *Rio Conventions* – on biodiversity, climate change and desertification – in 1992.

Low-carbon pathway

In 2005, Bangladesh prepared *The National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA)* and was the first country to adopt it. Later, the *Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP)* which is considered as an extension of *NAPA*, was prepared in 2009. The MoEFCC is the climate change related focal ministry of the Government, as well as the focal point of UNFCCC.

The *BCCSAP* was developed to ensure climate resilience followed a low-carbon pathway. It describes mostly medium and long-term programmes and includes 120 projects across six thematic areas: Food security, social protection and health; comprehensive disaster management; infrastructure; research and knowledge management; mitigation and low carbon development; and capacity building and institutional strengthening. Additionally, the sixth, seventh and eighth five-year plans have components concerning climate change.

The Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF) was created in 2009 to support the implementation of the *BCCSAP*. It became the first country to allocate \$350 million for climate change risk management from a non-development budget. Now, the BCCTF has a pot of \$450 million and has supported 789 projects up to 2021. Additionally, multilateral and bilateral development partners provide resources for undertaking climate actions.

Since the *BCCSAP* was formulated; multiple governments and NGOs have been pursuing adaptation projects to climate-proof development and reduce the effects of climate change on the economy. Some of the projects include food security, health and disaster management, coastal green belts, saline tolerant

crops, cyclone and flood shelters, community-based and ecosystem-based adaptation projects, water infrastructure and embankments. Perhaps other climate vulnerable countries can take note from the experiences of Bangladesh with the *BCCSAP* and BCCTF in how this strategy and funding window navigate, nurture and, in turn, help implement the building blocks of reaching climate resilience.

Bangladesh has also adopted Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to manage growing emissions without compromising development and to allow the country to play its role in global efforts to limit temperature rise to two degrees, or preferably 1.5°C, above pre-industrial levels.

Recently, Bangladesh developed a plan called the *Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCPP)* to move towards prosperity from climate resilience. This plan offers strategies to move from managing the adverse risks of climate change to achieving prosperity while overcoming all the risks associated with climate change. The *MCPP* is not intended as a replacement for the eighth five-year plan or the *Delta Plan 2100*. However, it attempts to bridge the knowledge and technical gaps that persist. This plan further promotes green opportunities, maximises climate resilience and lays out funding needs ahead of international, regional, public and private funding sources for technological advancement of the country.

The *MCPP*'s main agenda is to accelerate adaptation and resilience actions by empowering local communities, particularly those who are most at risk. The *MCPP* also places emphasis on enhancing the capabilities of private and public sectors to ensure better access to global green investment funds, as Bangladesh will certainly lose its share of grants from developed countries when it graduates out of least developed country (LDC) status. Third, it focuses on educating youth and empowering them to participate and contribute in generating ideas in solving such global crises. Finally, the *MCPP* aims to hasten the process of Bangladesh reaching middle-income status from LDC status and not rely on development partners for grants or intellectual input.

Bangladesh has undoubtedly outperformed most of the LDCs and has established itself as a role model for adaptation. However, there is still room for improvement in terms of adopting locally-led adaptation approaches and nature-based solutions. The *MCPP* outlines key investment areas for achieving prosperity from climate resilience. Nevertheless, managing, tracking and maintaining fiduciary standards of such investments is essential if Bangladesh aims to equip vulnerable communities and reduce climate change vulnerabilities at the local level. CRJ

Authors



DR SALEEMUL HUQ, Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and Professor at the Independent University Bangladesh (IUB)



MD BODRUD-DOZA is the Manager at the ICCCAD at IUB



KHANDKER TARIN TAHSIN is a Junior Research Officer at the ICCCAD at IUB



The climate crisis paints a bleak picture for Bangladesh. But, given its transformation in the last 50 years, the country's ambitions are something to look forward to
Haseeb Irfanullah