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# Climate Tribune



■ YOUTH FOR CLIMATE JUSTICE

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PHOTO: UNSPLASH

# Climate education for Bangladeshi children: Necessity or luxury?

Climate literacy is a necessity in this perilous phase of climate change and environmental collapse

Aruba Faruque

The climate crisis is one of the gravest of all hardships that humanity has confronted on this earth till date. Even though it is grim for each and every living being on earth, for those of us who are children today, like me, or those not even born yet, our words cannot entirely express the injustices we are going through presently, and potentially will go through in the days ahead.

Children in Bangladesh, according to the UNICEF's Children's Climate Risk Index rank 15th which is classified as being in "extremely high risk". The climate crisis is threatening more than twenty million Bangladeshi children's lives. This year's climate change-fueled floods in north-eastern Bangladesh affected at least 3.5 million children living in that region. It is ruining their health, education, nutrition, and indeed their childhood.

For that reason, we, the children, are the innocent victims of this crisis; our contribution to causing this catastrophe was the least, and yet we endured the most. To survive on this planet and make it acceptable for human habitation, we must

possess the knowledge, skills, and consciousness. For that, we do not have any alternative except incorporation of quality climate and environmental education at all levels of school curriculum. Climate literacy is a necessity in this perilous phase of climate change and environmental collapse.

Climate education stands for the education that targets to educate people to understand, recognize, and realize the causes and consequences of climate change, prepares them to survive through the impacts of this catastrophe, and motivates the community to take proper actions to adopt more sustainable ways of life, take part in the decision-making, while also leading their own localities towards climate resilience. Climate and environmental education at all stages of our school curriculum will enable the young generation to live through this crisis with more resilience, insight, and awareness.

Bangladesh, as the seventh most vulnerable and imperiled country to the climate crisis, currently has a small volume of climate and environment related information in its primary, junior-secondary, and secondary school textbooks. Most of those contents included in the science and social science



textbooks have introduced the basic components of the environment, natural disasters, environmental pollution and means to cope with them.

The materials only put a light focus on climate change, as well as mitigation and adaptation. However, we are in need of wide-ranging materials relating to the current situation of the globe and Bangladesh due to climate change and policy-making.

The sectors that are affected by climate change in Bangladesh are agriculture and fisheries; forestry and biodiversity; hydrology and water resources; coastal zones; urban areas; and human health, particularly for vulnerable groups, but contents that go into them give the impression to be either lacking or too concise. The English for Today textbooks have included one or two chapters in each class which mention tree plantation, renewable energy, nature, and climate change briefly, yet they do not appear to be sufficient, considering the broadness and urgency of this catastrophe.

“Building the adaptation and resilience capacity of our communities, and young people as climate leaders helping build a climate resilient future for our nation, should be one of our foremost goals”

Most importantly, no individual subject or learning field called “climate and environment” exists. Therefore, the current status of climate education in the Bangladeshi school curriculum may not be age-appropriate, adequate, and elaborate enough, considering our dire vulnerability.

The topic of climate change and environment needs to be taught through an all-inclusive and integrated approach, addressing the topic of climate and environment as a distinct interdisciplinary subject. Building the adaptation and resilience capacity of our communities, and young people as climate leaders helping build a climate resilient future for our nation, should be one of our foremost goals.

Indeed, these issues need to be developed and tailored considering age, specific contexts, and settings of the student. We must also keep in mind that our teachers, similarly, need to be trained to teach the subject regularly, creatively, and engagingly, by adopting innovative pedagogy.

So, in March 2021, I launched a nation-wide petition campaign as the youngest-yet person to ever do so. One of

our key demands in that campaign was inclusion of quality and detailed climate and environmental education in the school curriculum. Even though it was initiated by me, it soon became the petition of all. More than 2,000 people from home and abroad signed this petition enthusiastically, and prominent figures of the climate justice arena in our country also endorsed and encouraged our demand.

Prof Dr Saleemul Huq, Director of the International Centre for Climate Change And Development (ICCCAD) stated, “I am truly impressed by the exemplary dedication of Aruba Faruque towards her country, and it has been a pleasure to support the petition for implementing the planetary emergency declared by the Bangladesh Parliament and also the recommendation to include climate change in the school curriculum in Bangladesh.”

During our campaign, we found it difficult to make our ministry officials realize that the current status of climate and environmental education is simply not compatible with the severity of this crisis. The petition was submitted to our Honourable Prime Minister in September 2021. But we received tremendous support from the people of the climate justice movement. Finally, in May 2022, we received the good news that our restructured school curriculum will have a new learning field named “Climate and Environment” amongst nine other fields.

It is a magnificent victory, not only for the climate activist community, but also the future generations. This accomplishment, moreover, has given us the realization that advocacy works if it is pragmatic, realistic, and strategic. Indeed, there is nothing more instrumental than young people’s actions to save ourselves during this planetary emergency.

We are thankful to our authorities for listening to our demands to incorporate climate and environmental education in our school curriculum. Now, we should also deal with the question of elaboration and quality while shaping this emerging learning field suitably.

Perhaps, the best thing about education is that it passes on from one generation to another. Literacy is the most efficient pathway to start the ball of change rolling from the roots of a community as it focuses on engagement.

The climate crisis is an awfully unequal crisis, where the least emitters are suffering the severest scenarios. Hence, to get justice, we must get the picture of this catastrophe from the depths and act from our own roles and standpoints. Creating a knowledge-based young generation may be one of the best sustainable solutions to have our actions turn into a concrete outcome. ■

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# Women empowerment in Climate Change

Empowering young women for inclusive climate adaptation strategies



Attendees of the Young Women "RISE" Mentorship Programme Inception Workshop

COURTESY

Farhin Rahman Reeda and Nazmus Sakib

“If a tree is saved even at the cost of one’s head, it’s worth it” -- these were the words of Amrita Devi Bishnoi, the woman who sacrificed her life in the name of conservation. Her devotion greatly inspired the Chipko Andolan in the 1970s and, to this day, motivates women from different communities to stand up for their love for the environment.

The “Amrita Devi Bishnoi National Award for Wildlife Conservation” was introduced by the Indian Government for those who make significant contributions in the name of conservation, and do extraordinary work for wildlife protection.

Such a movement amongst women from rural communities is not a rare sight. This is because rural women are almost fully dependent on the natural resources from their environment for their daily survival. With the adverse effects of climate change, women (alongside other marginalized groups) are especially vulnerable, primarily as they are more dependent, and because of the lower access to resources and lack of autonomy.

With better resources and proper capacity building, many of these women could challenge the barriers they face and

improve their overall socio-economic well-being. Therefore, it is crucial that the need for the empowerment of women is highlighted in all climate change conversations going forward.

The 8th Five Year Plan has already included “Developing Gender-Inclusive Climate Change Response Framework” and “Gender Focus of Climate Action” under the chapter “Sustainable Development: Environment and Climate Change,” bringing forward the intention to address the issue of women’s greater vulnerability to climate change, and the overall needs of the most vulnerable population. The Plan also highlights that appropriate measures that will be taken by the government to increase women’s knowledge of environmental management and conservation, and investments will be made in education, capacity building training, technology transfer and environmental projects focusing on women.

The draft “Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan” also shows promise in this regard, with the introduction of the new hallmark initiatives such as “Mujib Locally Led Adaptation Hubs” and “Mujib Resilient Wellbeing Programs,” which are both gender-responsive and inclusive. The Plan also contains some expected socio-economic outcomes by 2030, which include “enhanced climate risk adjusted returns for micro, small, and medium enterprises of 10% by 2025 and

20% by 2030, especially for women-owned and women-run enterprises” and “increase in women’s participation in the labour force and reduced vulnerability of women.”

With women empowerment in mind, International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) and Action Aid Bangladesh are jointly organizing a 6-month long youth mentorship programme centering around young women in Bangladesh. The Young Women “RISE” Mentorship Programme will emphasize on women’s leadership and the need for it at a community and policy level.

“Empowering the girls of today to become the leaders of tomorrow is the number one solution”

The programme aims to capacitate young women in understanding different aspects of climate change, and how these changes may adversely affect their communities. This will be the third youth leadership program held under ICCCAD’s “RISE” Youth Program, abbreviated from “Re-think and Innovate for a Sustainable Environment”, with the first two being focused on mentoring a dynamic cohort of national university students.

These programmes are designed to equip the younger generations with knowledge of the environment and the

different policies related to them, to bridge the gap between the youth and climate change policy makers, and help bring about new innovations in the field of climate change.

The objective of the Young Women “RISE” Mentorship Programme includes creating a new generation of female leaders and change-makers in the field of climate change, empowering women so they can better transform their community, and increasing capability for incorporating a gender perspective into climate adaptation initiatives.

This will be achieved through sessions conducted both online and in-person, where experts will be brought in to deliver knowledge. After the initial learning period, field visits will be conducted to be able to translate the knowledge on ground. Additionally, mentorship will be provided on certain aspects, such as analyzing the relevant plans of Bangladesh through a feminist lens.

Teams will be formed among the participants to review and analyze particular policy documents, and this will be followed by a roundtable discussion, where the action points will be presented to relevant policymakers. At the end of the program, the youth participants, policymakers, and other civil society representatives will discuss a collaborative way forward in better integrating gender perspectives into mainstream policy planning and design.

The programme kicked off on August 4, 2022 with an inception workshop held at the ICCCAD office at Independent University, Bangladesh. The opening remarks were offered by Dr Saleemul Huq, Director of ICCCAD, where he mentioned “Looking ahead, climate change should be considered as a challenge and an opportunity, not a problem. Early climate change education focuses only on building awareness. It is time to shift that focus from awareness to solutions. ICCCAD focuses on establishing leadership in this regard, centering around the young people. It is important that everyone knows what to do as a citizen to solve the problems brought on by climate change.”

Going forward, the mentorship programme will provide the youth participants with hands-on experience via in-person workshops and training. The participants will be given specific tasks and they will be guided by climate change experts to help develop the necessary skills required to become leaders and change-makers in this field.

“Invest in girls’ education to become the leaders and champions of tomorrow. They should be empowered everywhere. Empowering the girls of today to become the leaders of tomorrow is the number one solution,” Dr Saleemul Huq stated at the 66th Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), earlier this year. ■

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# Youth engagement in the climate change policy arena of Bangladesh

How the youth are trying to play a key role in  
policy-making for a greener Bangladesh



DHAKA TRIBUNE

As climate change is becoming a common phenomenon it is intensifying floods, droughts, wildfires, sea level rise, and ocean acidification. However, vulnerable groups such as the youth, women, and girls are trying to turn this disadvantageous scenario into a golden opportunity by becoming agents of change to tackle the climate crisis. They are showing their relentless efforts in creating sustainable and greener business models, leading climate strikes, and raising awareness amongst their communities.

In Bangladesh, several youth-driven platforms, social enterprises, and organizations are flourishing currently -- such as Gross International Nature, GarbageMan, Reach Community BD, Footsteps, YouthNet, etc to become part of solving the climate crisis. However, the youth are still under-represented when it comes to policy-making or decision-making at the local, national, and global levels. Against this background, Youth Policy Forum (YPF) is a Bangladesh-based knowledge-sharing advocacy platform that aims to bridge the gap between the youth and policy-makers by promoting active and informed discourse on policy issues.

YPF has a number of networks but its most recent one was launched in 2021, which is the Environment and Climate Change network. This is mainly run by young future climate leaders and enthusiasts who are volunteering as leads, coordinators, and associates regularly. The group of young individuals supports the policy-makers by conducting secondary research to make evidence-based decisions. For instance, the young group of researchers provides a summary of key documents such as IPCC reports, the Paris Agreements, Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC), etc. Additionally, the youth of this network also conduct ad hoc research for the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF).

Recently, YPF's Environment and Climate Change network got invited to take part in the consultation of Bangladesh's National Adaptation Plan (NAP). During the consultation, one representative from the network had the opportunity to take part in group work and discussions to validate the NAP. Additionally, the youth network is actively working with the Earth Society (Climate Parliamentarians) to analyze the FY2022-23 Budget and find the relevant climate change and environment allocation.

Moreover, knowledge dissemination and capacity-building are key priority areas of the Environment and Climate Change Network. In March, the youth network partnered with the British High Commission in Dhaka and led a project called Youth, Climate Action, and the Commonwealth. One of the key activities of this project was to collect primary data from the south-western part of Bangladesh in Khulna and Satkhira, the two most climate vulnerable regions of Bangladesh.

The young researchers went to the field and collated

climate change and disaster-related data through Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and Key Informant Interview (KII) from the local communities. In addition to this, the researchers also arranged virtual webinars on loss and damage; and youth's role in commonwealth nations to tackle the climate crisis. This year, the young researchers initiated a standalone conference titled Road to COP27 to bring NGOs, civil society organizations, policy-makers, and academics to pave the way forward for COP27.

This dynamism of the environment and climate change network of YPF signifies how the youth has the potential to understand the intersectionality of climate change and develop solutions through transformative knowledge dissemination.

When the perspective of the younger generation is

“ In Bangladesh, several youth-driven platforms, social enterprises, and organizations are flourishing currently ”

incorporated into policies and initiatives, it resonates with higher transparency and inclusiveness of the government to build greener habitats. In the future, YPF's environment and climate change network aims to provide tailored capacity-building sessions to its young research associates on locally-led adaptation, usage of renewable energy in rural areas, and non-economic loss and damage.

Additionally, in the future, the network intends to transmit local, vulnerable communities' messages to policy-makers at COP27 and the global platforms, and also develop capacity-building modules for future youth negotiators to participate at COPs. ■

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# No more excuses for Loss and Damage

Fighting loss and damage requires finance immediately

Ineza Umuhoza Grace

“Loss and Damage” is the current injustice of our generation.

The negative impacts of climate change are being felt to an extent that has never been recorded in human history, especially by young women and girls. But I am proud to be a part of the generation that doesn't want to blame the past generation as we seek to be part of the solution.

My name is Ineza Umuhoza Grace, I am an Eco-Feminist impact-driven actor in the climate change sector based in Rwanda. I am part of the Loss and Damage Youth Coalition.

Climate change's impacts are a constant reminder that our inaction to address the issue is leaving the vulnerable far behind and we won't be able to have a safe future if we ignore the issue. Rwanda is a landlocked country that did less to contribute to climate change, yet the community is vulnerable as any hope of a sustainable future can be washed by the negative effects of climate change.



Intensive rainfall destroys the crops, especially of the small-scale farmers who are mostly women, in addition, the infrastructures (schools roads, hospitals) are also destroyed and it is usually our country's GDP that is used to build back from all the damages.

“ The world will achieve climate justice if we address the issue of loss and damage effectively ”

The Loss and Damage Youth Coalition is from both the global south and north aiming to build a partnership by taking action on loss and damage. We demand that the global north countries take responsibility for the outside contribution to the climate change impact. It is unfair that those who did less are the ones paying up to recover what is damage mainly done by others.

We started in 2020, and are now a coalition of more than 400 youth from 41 plus countries.

The core demand of our initiative is “Loss and Damage finance,” we need new additional and accessible finance to be allocated for the frontline communities who are facing climate change impacts on a daily basis; hence we need the Loss and Damage Finance now.

We share our message through open letters that are sent to the world leaders, by delivering training on loss and damage to enhance the ability of the youth to participate and engage on the national and international level, we share the lived experiences of the youth in the form of blogs and videos.

In our message to COP27 in June, we requested the establishment of the youth advisory committee on loss and damage. As the international process needs to promote public participation there is a need of building a long-term strategy in bringing together expertise to accelerate climate action. As youth are disproportionately affected by the negative impacts of climate change, the establishment of the advisory on loss and damage will allow the formulation of a non-tokenistic approach to youth inclusion in taking action to address loss and damage.

Youth inclusion should be an active strategy at all levels of taking action on climate change. Youth are holders of the tangible solution that can bring hope as we strive to achieve global solidarity for achieving climate justice.

On the road to COP27, we are undertaking #LossandDamageFinanceNow We are engaging with youth across the globe to collect and share their experiences that will serve as backup research to support the negotiation requesting the need for the finance for loss and damage under the UNFCCC, delivering a training session on loss and damage in French, English, Spanish; and supporting youth participation in COP27.

The world will achieve climate justice if we address the issue of loss and damage effectively. For me, this issue should be addressed by listening actively to the voice of the grassroots community as they demand the world to have a robust mechanism to address loss and damage, and an establishment of a funding arrangement that will allow the frontline community to have access on timely finance support to recover from damages because currently, these impacts are costing the development of the global south community; this finance needs to be new, additional, and accessible.

There is no excuse for justifying climate inaction. We are all part of one planet and none are “vaccinated” against climate change impacts, but together we can allow the future generation to have a safe planet. ■

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**Ineza Umuhoza Grace, serves as the global coordinator of the loss and damage youth coalition, her research interest lies in loss and damage in relation to its finance, politics, voice of the community and concrete action on the ground.**

# The role of “Eco-Network” for spreading environmental knowledge in local community

The dream is to make a green Bangladesh as envisioned by the Father of the Nation



Considering Bangladesh as one of the most vulnerable countries in terms of climate change and natural disasters, it is essential that youth, students, and the government work together to combat the crisis.

To achieve the green vision of the Father of the Nation, since 2018, Eco-Network has been trying to change the mindset of our new generation by ensuring climate literacy and increasing awareness about plastic pollution and air pollution, among many other environmental issues. Our initiative provides climate education to more than 50,000 students through online and offline campaigns, workshops, and summits. We are also working to protect biodiversity and want to plant 50,000 trees to mark the 50th anniversary of Bangladesh's independence.

The journey started in 2018, when I felt the need to have a youth platform to help our government achieve our common goal of achieving environmental sustainability. Currently, Eco-Network has a team in 34 Bangladeshi universities, and our climate ambassadors are spreading climate literacy locally. Our major aims include involving youngsters in environmental and climate movements; conducting eco-friendly activities; and fostering an eco-friendly culture in society. Eco-Network also works in Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, India, and other Asian and African countries.

To be very specific, children and young people are the main stakeholders in our work. We mainly focus on school-going students and teenagers as we believe if we can make them aware of climate change, environmental pollution, etc from an early age, it will help to change their mindset. We have prepared a complete training module on climate literacy that helps them to get a basic knowledge of climate change, environmental pollution, and adaptation. We regularly organize capacity-building training, awareness campaigns, workshops, etc.

Besides, two of our current projects, "Mission Green Bangladesh" and "Climate School," have significant impacts on our society. Our research team is also working on air pollution, climate adaptation, and finding nature-based solutions to ensure sustainable development. In a broader perspective, students and young people are the main stakeholders of our actions, as we are concerned about changing a generation, and adolescence is the perfect time to build a mindset.

We started our organization with the vision of mobilizing climate literacy in our community. Within four years of the establishment of Eco-Network, we have reached more than 2 lakh people from rural and urban areas through online and offline campaigns. During the journey, we became champions of "Climathon 2019," nominated for the "Eco-Hero award" organized by Eco Generation (UNEP).

We also jointly worked with the Department of

Environment (DoE), ActionAid Bangladesh, and Save the Children Bangladesh to ensure climate justice and environmental sustainability. Additionally, each year we host a "Global Climate Summit" at which a diverse range of national and international guests and participants collaborate to achieve transboundary solutions.

For us, our main success is our contribution towards making a green Bangladesh, which was the dream of the Father of the Nation. Besides, it's a pleasure to see that Eco-network is working in 23 countries in South Asia and Africa

“ We started our organization with the vision of mobilizing climate literacy in our community ”

and leading globally. For our contribution to raising climate and environmental awareness in Global South countries, I have also received "Diana Award-2022" which is the highest honour a young person can receive for contributions to the development and humanitarian work, and is supported by both her sons, Prince William, Duke of Cambridge, and Prince Harry, Duke of Sussex. ■

**Shamim Ahmed Mridha is the Chairman of Eco-Network Global, and his research interests include climate adaptation, resilience, nature-based solutions, and so on. He can be reached at [shamimahmedmridha@gmail.com](mailto:shamimahmedmridha@gmail.com). He has completed his undergraduate and postgraduate studies from the "Department of Environmental Science" Bangladesh University of Professionals (BUP).**

# Youth in disaster management: How grassroots youth volunteerism mitigated embankment failure impacts in burigoalini, Satkhira

An inspiring story of the power of youth in averting disaster



Grassroots voluntary disaster management initiatives by "Shawpna Rath" and "Sundarbans Students' Solidarity Team"

COURTESY

**D**isaster management refers to strategically responding to a catastrophe, allocating emergency supplies to help the affected community to recover, and taking well-planned steps to mitigate the impacts and prepare for the next disaster. This bookish definition of disaster management includes four key phases -- mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery, and together they represent the “Disaster Management Cycle.”

But do people care about this academic jargon when a sudden catastrophe strikes? When the existence of life gets threatened, making survival the one vital priority, humans rush for whatever their basic instincts trigger them to do. But even through all the chaos of a disaster time situation, sometimes specific individuals set examples of taking strategic steps, bringing unity among the affected, and building a line of defense for the rest of the community.

Such impressive precedents were set by Md Masum Billah (23) and Bhaskar Mondol (23) with their associated voluntary organizations, when 150 feet of polder embankment along the Kholpetua River collapsed, bringing havoc to the inhabitants of the Union of Burigoalini in Shyamnagar, Satkhira.

On July 14, 2022, at around 12 PM, 50 feet of the polder embankment in the Union of Burigoalini of Shyamnagar, Satkhira, Khulna adjacent to the Kholpetua River collapsed, endangering its inhabitants and their properties. During such pressing moments, instead of getting lost in the chaos, Bhaskar Mondol, a local youth leader, led his youth-led voluntary organization “Shawpna Rath” to the affected area and started to gather chunks of mud to mend the collapsed portion of the polder embankment. Their valiant effort inspired other voluntary organizations and created unity among the distressed. Their united “response” to the emergency provided a fighting chance for the inhabitants to secure their valuables and move to safety.

But as the day advanced to the night, tidal activities started to affect the patched area of the polder embankment. The water of the Kholpetua River rose at an alarming rate as the lunar high tide kicked in. Around 11 PM, the violent tidal current washed away the patched-up portion of the polder embankment. As the night advanced to the next day, the diurnal-tidal cycle forced water from the Kholpetua River to rush inside the locality, extending the broken portion of the polder embankment to 150 feet by 11 AM of July 15, 2022, destroying the polder road, submerging acres of shrimp ponds, paddy fields, and homestead areas with brackish water.

The massive 150-foot-long damaged portion of the polder embankment was beyond the capacity of the inhabitants to fix. By August 16, 2022, the Water Development Board appointed contractors to fix the polder embankment, and lead the community to “recovery.” But according to local

informants, the contractors just piled up the necessary materials to reconstruct the polder embankment near the affected area, and did not bother to take any action on that day.

Witnessing such disorder, Bhaskar Mondol (23) and his team of youth volunteers responded immediately. On July 17, 2022, they, along with other voluntary organizations and general inhabitants, volunteered to build up the damaged portion of the embankment with the materials the constructors brought to the spot the other day.

““ The liveliness of the youth along with the responsibility-seeking characteristics of the young adult minds are key elements of effective grassroots-level disaster management activities ””

Later, with the instructions from the appointed contractors, more than 1,000 local inhabitants, and youth volunteers together worked throughout the entire day and ended up mending almost 80% of the collapsed embankment, and by July 18, 2022, all the 150 feet of the collapsed embankment got temporarily fixed -- while more engineering works on it are still going on.

Throughout this entire ongoing period of “recovery,” Md Masum Billah (23), another resident of the region along with his youth-led voluntary organization “Sundarbans Students’ Solidarity Team” distributed medicines and

saline powder packs to almost 150 families of the affected regions to “mitigate” the impacts of the disaster. His organization also distributed sanitary napkins among many of the affected families as the necessities for such amenities are often ignored within the government-allotted relief materials.

To raise funds for these voluntary activities, he and the members of his organization donated their pocket money, raised money from the local political leaders, and received financial help from some of the students of the University of Khulna. With funding from the local government authorities, his organization helped to distribute lunch for the inhabitants who volunteered to mend the embankment. His organization also managed to allot funds for supplying 1,000 litres of potable drinking water to the affected families every day starting from July 17, 2022 and distributed and helped to set up rainwater harvesting polyethylene sheets in at least 25 families so far.

Throughout all the mentioned youth-led activities in managing such a disaster, one of the key phases of the disaster management cycle, “Preparedness” is missing. The community was not well prepared to respond strategically which made them vulnerable to such a disaster from the beginning. The polder embankment also has major engineering and quality-related flaws as the structure collapsed without the presence of any severe weather conditions.

The structure also was not built keeping the impacts of rising sea levels along the coastline of the Bay of Bengal into consideration. Sea-level rise, one of the most insidious impacts of climate change, contributes to making the lunar high tides gradually violent annually. But Burigoalini is blessed that it has youth leaders like Bhaskar Mondol and Md Masum Billah whose voluntary organizations managed to go through major phases of the disaster management cycle from the absolute grassroots level.

The liveliness of the youth along with the responsibility-seeking characteristics of the young adult minds are key elements of effective grassroots-level disaster management activities. Well-planned youth-focused development activities like long-term high-level training workshops, fieldwork, and drills to make potential youth leaders more coordinated, motivated, and strategically efficient will inherently increase the capacity of their communities to prepare and respond to a disaster appropriately, reducing their disaster vulnerabilities, and allowing them to be more proficient to progress faster through the recovery phase and mitigate the impacts of any disaster efficiently. ■

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“ Throughout all the mentioned youth-led activities in managing such a disaster, one of the key phases of the disaster management cycle, “Preparedness” is missing ”

## Women are in the frontline, fixing climate crisis

Opposing climate change through feminist leadership

Shakila Islam

Over the past few decades, flash floods, storm surges, cyclones, heat waves, and droughts have become a new normal for Bangladesh. The country has a nearly unparalleled vulnerability to climate crisis. It's presently well-understood that climate crisis increases existing inequalities and disproportionately affects girls and women.

I believe women and girls can build the greater resilience and fix the future for people and planet. Our unheard voices, responsibilities, and knowledge on climate change, and the challenges we face need to be central to the opposition presented against climate threat through UN summits like COP27.

At 12 years old, my family and I were hit by Super Cyclone Sidar which affected more than 8 million people in the country. Consequently, my family was forced to move from our coastal village. Since then, I have been passionate about working in disaster risk management and tackling climate



DHAKA TRIBUNE

crisis. Running my fieldwork in the coastal belt, I realised how climate change is a hidden factor like lack of education, malnutrition, and soaring child marriage rates. However, 'climate change' is not a popular term that the general public is familiar with.

So, I formed a youth team and founded YouthNet for Climate Justice to raise mass awareness -- a group that is the largest network for climate advocacy in Bangladesh right now. We are working in about 50 districts where our current priority is women empowerment.

YouthNet's advocacy includes multiple avenues: Community outreach programmes, collaboration with local government and educational institutions, assembling numerous youth-led organizations for the common purpose of tackling climate crisis, developing a youth movement towards climate justice in Bangladesh, voicing support for a just transition to a climate-friendly society, co-creating solutions and occupying seats at the decision-making table at a policy-level, along with the facilitation of negotiating process.

As part of its advocacy strategies, YouthNet implements community outreach programmes to disseminate information on climate and disaster preparedness, safe water, and health sanitation. The yearly action plans of YouthNet have been set in motion that includes community mobilization, advocacy, and capacity-building, monitoring of disaster risk reduction, and climate change adaptation activities.

In 2019, YouthNet joined in the first global climate strike expressing solidarity with Greta Thunberg and the Fridays for Future movement to hold the global community accountable for the urgent climate action and support to the affected communities. Afterwards, we organized a model youth parliament session in Barishal that passed a bill on the climate emergency.

Following this, in November, Bangladesh's National Parliament passed its first-ever Planetary Emergency Bill fulfilling demands of the young climate activists. Another major victory for climate action was YouthNet's protest against the coal-powered plant in Matarbari being developed by the Bangladeshi authorities and Japanese investors. This environmentally destructive move drew heavy criticism and YouthNet held several strikes in innovative ways.

Eventually, Japan pulled out funding from a major coal power project, Matarbari 2 in Cox's Bazar, and the government canceled 16 out of the 21 coal plant projects around the country. The country's recent Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan aims to increase the resilience of coastal communities and harness the global imperative to address and adapt to climate change as a catalyst for increased economic prosperity.

Currently, YouthNet has built a partnership with Climate Parliament Bangladesh to enhance climate governance by engaging young people from local to national levels. YouthNet for Climate Justice has also established a Coastal Youth Action Hub where we provide knowledge-based training and mentoring support for the young people. This action hub promotes innovative solutions to adapt to climate change issues. Moreover, the youth are advocating for a pollution-free environment, use of green technology

“ The possession of power over others, including other men, women, children, and nature, is part of the harmful expectations that shape masculinity ”

in the coastal areas for safe drinking water supply, strengthening of food and nutrition security, sustainable livelihoods, and construction of sustainable embankments. During COVID-19 pandemic, we began making and distributing free face masks, hand sanitizers and hand soaps, as well as reaching economically disadvantaged people through community campaigns. We also successfully raised funds online to deliver 1,000 relief packages to the marginalized Manta fishing community and climate migrants in Barishal.

Sexual and gender-based violence is a potential consequence of this pandemic. The economic strain on families due to the outbreak may put children, especially girls, at increased risk of exploitation, child marriage, and gender-based violence. This year Bangladesh faced one of the most devastating and record-breaking floods. YouthNet's young volunteers are the ones working in the frontline to deal with the crises. They were in operation in remotest locations like Osmani Nagar, Bishwamvarpur, Tahirpur of Sylhet, and Sunamganj districts to support during the flooding.

They provided dry food, safe drinking water, and oral saline to the flood-affected communities. Nearly 500 sanitary



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“ A man-made climate crisis is killing Mother Earth and women. The possession of power over others, including other men, women, children, and nature, is part of the harmful expectations that shape masculinity ”

napkins were distributed, as well. They also reached the isolated communities in Kurigram and Netrokona districts with safe shelter support. Currently, they're imparting tin substances to construct new homes and toilets based on the urgency for rehabilitation. Nearly 150 volunteers have been involved in this flood response where women were in the lead and they have distributed relief items to over 5,000 families.

Climate crisis is not just an environmental, economic, or development problem; it's a matter of human right, equality, and justice. Too often, when we think of climate destruction,

we focus on the symptoms without paying attention to the root causes: Patriarchy and neoliberal capitalism based on patriarchal norms, colonialism, and racism. Climate change is not a normal process, but a symptom and a consequence of domination. This narrative must be dismantled, decolonized, and a more caring people created in its place. Thus, transformation means a radical change in the system. Patriarchal forms of masculinity play an important role in perpetuating social and environmental injustices.

A man-made climate crisis is killing Mother Earth and women. The possession of power over others, including other men, women, children, and nature, is part of the harmful expectations that shape masculinity. These norms must be exposed to the harm they cause. It must be challenged globally, in harmony with other efforts to transform the system, ensure human rights for all, and facilitate the green care economy.

Business and government leaders must be held accountable for harmful environmental policies and behaviors. Political complacency, procrastination, and excuses should be exposed for what they are. A mistake in leadership is a tragic defeat for both humanity and life on Earth. Their domination and procrastination result in death sentences for millions of women and girls. Addressing this crisis requires more female leaders on the negotiating table to save people and the planet, not pointless profit. ■

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**Shakila Islam is working as a National Coordinator of the Youth-Net for Climate Justice. In 2018, she received the Joy Bangla Youth Award in recognition of her exemplary contribution in the climate and environmental protection arena. This year she has also received an award from UNDP & Action-aid Bangladesh.**



DHAKA TRIBUNE

# From local efforts to COP

Young people will be in the driving seat on climate action

Sohanur Rahman

**A**longside the climate crises, humanity is witnessing two additional interlinked planetary crises: Biodiversity loss and pollution. Climate-induced loss and damage are already happening around the world and are likely to grow in the future, as confirmed by scientists. It will impact all nations, poor as well as wealthy, everywhere, and everyone. The least contributing countries like Bangladesh are, and will continue to be, the worst victims. Vulnerable communities like women and children are paying the highest price for the rising climate disasters.

Only collective action from governments and corporations

could yet avert the worst outcomes by limiting greenhouse-gas emissions and preparing communities to live with the changing climate. However, the global community is not taking adequate action urgently to tackle this crisis. Without knowing the negative impacts and potential solutions, they cannot continue business as usual and greenwash by hosting empathy climate summits.

Though most vulnerable communities have the strongest resilience, their voices remain unheard at the UN climate summits. It's the right time to amplify the untold stories of those on the frontlines.

Last year, I was in Glasgow for 2 weeks to attend COP26 and hoped to take back good news to the most affected communities. It was disappointing for all marginalized people whose voices were excluded from the conference. Even though Youth was recognized for the first time at COP, I left with feelings of helplessness and betrayal. These empty pledges named the Glasgow Climate Pact won't protect us from this global crisis and displacement. However, COP26 president Alok Sharma made "adaptation" a priority, establishing a 2-year long Glasgow-Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on a global adaptation goal. It incorporates an extraordinary goal for developed countries to double the financing provided to developing countries for adaptation by 2025.

It is undeniable that young people have a vital leadership role to hold in front of global world climate decision makers. "Youth and Future Generations Day" has been a key milestone of the Climate summits since COP21. Youth teams have already demonstrated their capabilities in required actions and supporting environmental causes locally as well as globally. During COP26, my fellow youth delegates from

different countries and I took the platform to stress the need to take words into urgent action, as our future is at risk.

One key outcome of COP26 is that young people finally got a voice through the Glasgow Climate Pact. This agreement called parties and stakeholders “to ensure meaningful youth participation and representation in multilateral, national and local decision-making processes, together with including the convention and the Paris Agreement,” highlighting the role of youth inclusion at all levels. Its simple factor is that Youth participation in climate action is one of the main pillars of inclusivity. Youth should be more prominent actors in the decision-making, and even the implementation process, and not simply in advocacy works as we are now.

Forthcoming COP27 must be more inclusive and annual pre-COP can be a YouthCOP; moreso as an “Accountability COP” from now. In the COP process, there must be greater Youth representation in national delegations and meaningful participation in subnational, national, and regional dialogues in the lead-up to the conference. It must facilitate larger access to badges and funds for youth, particularly those from the global south, and allow observers to participate fully in negotiation sessions.

Though, I am highly concerned that COP27 will be worse than COP26. Already, rights groups are demanding the UNFCCC move the venue from Egypt as a result of fears of human rights violations. At COP27, We young people will present our agenda and keep pushing for effective outcomes.

A climate conference is supposed to deliver positive outcomes for women, children, youth, and indigenous people while their meaningful engagement is ensured. But at COP26, they were outside being pushed back by the police while big businesses were in the delegations. The Covid-19 pandemic further compounds the inaccessibility of climate talks for people from the global south.

On the other hand, youth participation in climate interventions is very limited in our country. In disaster response and adaptation, young people on the frontline provide humanitarian support and lead the adaptation efforts as the first responders as well as early climate adapters. We know that Bangladesh just completed its 2nd tenure of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) presidency. I think it’s a missed opportunity to engage young people in the CVF while Ghana appointed a youth ambassador before taking over the presidency.

Bangladesh is committed to ensuring the youth’s participation by signing an Intergovernmental Declaration on Children, Youth and Climate Action at the COP25. The country labelled the long-term Delta Plan as a gift for the future generation but, unfortunately, it’s ignoring us in the implementation process. Bangladesh also highlighted young people’s engagement in the National Youth Policy and National Adaptation Plan, but effective actions to children and youth engagement from local, national to global stages

“ Youth teams have already demonstrated their capabilities in required actions and supporting environmental causes locally as well as globally ”

are unseen. The government has not created any space for young people in the country’s delegation and negation process either.

However, youth activists are closely advocating with relevant ministry and parliamentary forums such as Climate Parliament Bangladesh to include young people in the driving seats on climate action by hosting regular dialogues and lobbying. Expectations and empty talks are not enough for effective youth engagement. So, the government and other development partners have to invest in youth-led organizations and networks, and include youth in the climate action process, thus creating a pathway for the youth to act as agents of climate solutions.

It’s time to ensure global solidarity with the most marginalized communities, youth, and children, and include them in shaping a better future. Because we are the today, we are the tomorrow, and without us, there is no future but a dead planet. ■

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