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■ YOUTH TACKLES CLIMATE CRISIS

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Bangladesh Unbowed: Chronicles of Resilience from the Climate Frontlines

Abul Bashar Rahman and Rifat Abrar Anik

The rising sun casts an ethereal glow over Bangladesh's landscapes, painting a picture of tranquility. But as serene as our land may appear at dawn, by day, it faces a persistent foe: the burgeoning threats of climate change.

While the global narrative often portrays Bangladesh as a tragic casualty of our warming world - a tapestry of submerged villages, ravaging cyclones, and withering crops - we have been on a journey that tells a different story. A tale of

courage, innovation, and an unbending will.

From the agricultural heartlands in the north to our storm-kissed coastlines, there is an inspiring tapestry of adaptation. These stories aren't simply about survival, but about a nation's spirit to thrive, innovate, and reshape its destiny in the face of adversity. There are farmers who, when confronted with erratic weather patterns, have championed alternative farming. Coastal communities, battling rising salinities, have conjured floating gardens from aquatic plants. These tales are the lifeblood of "Stories of Change" - our endeavor to capture and spotlight the stories that often go unheard.



Bashar, poised with his bicycle, at the iconic Banglabandha Zero Point in Tetulia

- Photo Courtesy

Our documentary, currently in the throes of meticulous production, is not merely a visual narrative. It's a soulful tribute to Bangladesh's spirit, capturing moments of adversity and triumph. These are the stories of everyday individuals who, amidst the backdrop of changing landscapes and uncertain futures, stand tall, becoming beacons of hope and epitomes of resilience. Their tales, often lost amidst the cacophony of mainstream media, emerge in our documentary as powerful testaments to human spirit and determination.

Complementing this visual journey is our "Climate Atlas." This endeavor is far from a conventional compilation of data. Instead, it uniquely merges scientific facts with heartfelt human stories. The Atlas delves deep, intertwining stark climate realities with the poignant anecdotes of those most affected. The result is a multi-dimensional perspective that not only underscores the immense challenges Bangladesh faces but also illuminates the myriad ways our people rise above them. Each page, each graph, each story is a testament to our nation's unwavering spirit.

“As we pause and reflect on our rich tapestry of history, our contemplations extend beyond mere celebration”

But the question arises: In the vast sea of global narratives, why is our story so pivotal?

As global leaders scramble to address the climate emergency, they often overlook the grassroots realities. Our mission is to ensure they don't. By showcasing Bangladesh's stories of resilience, we aim to steer global climate discourse and policymaking, emphasizing solutions rooted in local wisdom.

On our journey across the heartland of Bangladesh, we encountered a beacon of such local brilliance. Amidst the vast expanses of floodwaters, we met an individual from a remote 4-family household, completely isolated from basic ameni-

ties. Defying despair, they had ingeniously crafted roads using water hyacinth (kochuripana), forging a path amidst adversity. It's moments like these that underscore our mission: to ensure that these grassroots narratives are not lost in the cacophony of global discussions.

Our goal with "Stories of Change" is to ensure these narratives resonate on global platforms, driving both empathy and action.

This year, Bangladesh stands at a pivotal juncture, proudly marking half a century of its hard-won independence. As we pause and reflect on our rich tapestry of history, our contemplations extend beyond mere celebration. They represent a deep reverence for the sacrifices made, the voices raised, and the relentless pursuit of freedom that defined our nation's birth. Those harrowing days of the Liberation War, when hope and despair danced side by side, are imprinted in our collective consciousness. They remind us of the blood spilled, the songs sung, and the indomitable spirit that propelled us from oppression to sovereignty.

In the wake of this storied history, as the chapters of our nationhood continue to unfold, a contemporary challenge casts its shadow over our lands: the relentless and encroaching impact of climate change. Yet, Bangladesh, with its legacy of resilience, refuses to be subdued. The same spirit that once resisted colonial chains now stands firm against rising tides and erratic weather. Our journey, fraught with challenges of geopolitical struggles, has uniquely prepared us for this moment. The adversity we face is not new, but the arena has changed. Our path, though now illuminated by the complexities of environmental concerns, remains guided by the luminous beacon of hope, innovation, and unwavering determination.

However, narrating our saga to the world requires more than evocative recounts of past and present challenges. It demands action, advocacy, and global collaboration. This is our earnest plea to you, dear Climate Tribune readers. As we delve deep into the myriad climate stories that span our verdant deltas, majestic rivers, and bustling cities, your support becomes invaluable. By standing with us, you amplify our voice, ensuring that the tales of Bangladesh's fortitude and innovation resonate globally, influencing discourses and inspiring solutions for a more resilient future.

Our dedicated team, a band of 25 passionate volunteers, tirelessly champions a mission that extends across the diverse landscapes of Bangladesh. While some don their travel gear, journeying through bustling cities, serene villages, and along the meandering paths of our riverbanks to document real stories, others delve deep into research, analyzing data and gleaning insights. And then, there are those who work behind the scenes, ensuring that these stories are heard far and wide, playing a crucial role in amplifying the voices of those who face the direct impacts of climate change. Each member, in their unique role, contributes to piecing together



The landscapes of Sylhet's Tila, marred by unauthorized stone quarries
- Photo Courtesy

“ Our mission, fueled by dedication and love for our homeland, also grapples with the very real constraints of financial and logistical challenges ”

an intricate tapestry that showcases the unparalleled strength and resilience of our people.

However, the vast expanse of our vision and the multifaceted nature of our work require more than just the combined efforts of our team. Our mission, fueled by dedication and love for our homeland, also grapples with the very real constraints of financial and logistical challenges. Join us in this critical mission. Invest in the tales of determination and ingenuity emerging from our shores. Celebrate and support the local solutions that can inspire global strategies. Because even in the shadow of monumental challenges, Bangladesh stands tall, echoing the indomitable spirit of its people. ■

Stay connected, support, and champion our cause:

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Global Climate Strike by young people at Dhaka on September 2022. Photo Credit: Youthnet for Climate Justice

Missing Voices from Bangladesh: Empowering Child Representation at COP28 Aruba Faruque

Aruba Faruque

As I embark on my third article for the Climate Tribune, the weight of this four-year odyssey in climate activism amazes me. Starting as a determined teenager, I persist as an impassioned adolescent, resolute in my mission, and fueled by an unwavering determination.

I was 13 years old when the super-cyclone Fani destroyed the Noakhali district, my former home. The scenes of destruction were devastating, and

it sparked my curiosity about its cause. As I explored the realm of climate change, it became painfully clear that the promises made to heal our planet were often empty words. The climate crisis had become a blatant injustice that the following generations will inherit. The more I learned, the more I understood that the fight against climate change is not just about saving the earth – it's about ensuring justice for all, particularly for those who will inherit the world we leave behind. It was a turning point that set me on the path of activism I'm still walking today. Soon, it had be-

come a passion that I was resolute to pursue. I felt my heart's voice urging me to act and join the chorus of individual like me who are pushing for action, justice and accountability in the face of this catastrophe. The weight of broken pledges compelled me to advocate for a world our planet deserves, a world of nature's longing, and a legacy the future can cherish.

Starting from August 2019 until this very day, my passion for climate and environmental activism has not only remained steadfast but has grown stronger with every passing moment. My activism over the past four years have been quite challenging but my unwavering determination has made me continue. In my early days of activism, I proudly lent my voice to the global movement of Fridays for Future, where passionate souls converge to fight for our planet's future. Additionally, as an Ambassador for the vibrant ConscienceLAND global network, I've tirelessly promoted climate justice and environmental sustainability, uniting with like-minded advocates from around the world. A pivotal moment arrived when, at the age of 14, I launched a nationwide petition campaign. Our goal? The implementation of Bangladesh's planetary emergency declaration and the crucial incorporation of climate and environmental education into our school curriculum. Though the journey was packed with obstacles, through a year-long advocacy effort, we achieved a remarkable victory—the approval of climate and environmental education in schools. This win was a testament to the power of advocacy fueled by passion, unwavering dedication, and relentless perseverance. Through organizing the School Climate Olympiad, I've sparked the flames of awareness and action, bringing together more than 250 students from the Brahmanbaria district, spreading the message of climate justice far and wide.

Throughout this incredible journey, I've come to understand that the question of our age and capability, as children and youth climate activists, is frequently brought up by many. Despite the significant achievements of young activists like Licypriya, Greta, Vanessa, Xiye Bastida, and countless others who have made noteworthy contributions to the cause of climate and environmental activism, the issue of age continues to cast its shadow over local, national, and global forums.

But does age truly matter when it comes to climate activism?

From my perspective as a young activist, age should not be considered as an incapability to climate activism; it should be a catalyst. I believe that our passion, energy, and determination are some of our greatest assets in this crucial fight against the climate crisis. We're not just the leaders of tomorrow; we're the ones who will inherit the consequences of today's decisions. Sure, we may lack experience, but that doesn't diminish our ability to understand the gravity of the climate crisis. We're growing up witnessing its impacts, feeling the anxiety, and recognizing the need for immediate action. Our age doesn't make us any less knowledgeable or passionate about

“ This win was a testament to the power of advocacy fueled by passion, unwavering dedication, and relentless perseverance ”

the dream of a better tomorrow; if anything, it propels us to be even more vocal, demanding accountability from those in power. When it comes to climate activism, what truly matters are our commitment, our willingness to learn and adapt and our relentless pursuit of change. We believe that the collective power of our generation can shake the foundations of inaction and ensure a better future, not just for ourselves, but for every living being on this planet. We're also the embodiment of hope, change, a future where our planet thrives.

We, the young people, aren't just the leaders of a distant tomorrow; we are the voices resounding through the present, and our inclusion is not just important—it's paramount. Even though, many youths from Bangladesh were included

and represented at the national and global forums to some extent, the seats for the representation of children and adolescents remained unoccupied until today. Referring to the disappointing absence of child representation at COP27 held in Egypt last year, while youth have been acknowledged both within countries and as observers, the participation of children from Bangladesh has amounted to a disheartening zero. We are outraged by this heart-wrenching absence. In the face of the Climate Crisis, we must embrace the diversity of age and undoubtedly, children are among the most impacted age-group of all. We will inherit the future of this planet more than any other age group. Silencing our brave voices and taking away our rightful chairs signify nothing but an obvious injustice and exclusion of an entire generation.

The call to action is urgent: it's time to give children and adolescents especially girls seats at every table, from local discussions to global stages. We cannot afford to make decisions about the future without the very generations who will inherit it. It's not just a matter of token representation; it's about acknowledging their right to be part of shaping their own destiny. As COP28 approaches, it's crucial that children and adolescent climate activists especially girls are recognized as the key stakeholders they are. We deserve a space where we can express our opinions freely, where our voices hold weight in the decisions that will shape the world we inherit. We're demanding the right to shape the decisions that will influence our lives, communities, and planet. We should not be considered passive spectators but active participants who unafraid to express concerns, passionate about being part of the solutions and shape the crucial decisions. Therefore, it is essential that the upcoming COP28 champions inclusion of children and adolescents particularly girls from Bangladesh at all scopes- observer and government delegations.

It's high time to give us, the young people not only seats but also megaphones, amplifying our voices, ideas, and aspirations. It is the high time to bridge the generational gap and to recognize that we're all stakeholders in the planet's future. By embracing the energy and vision of children, adolescents and youth, we can collaborate, understand, and act more efficiently. The time has come to give us the chairs we deserve and the space we need, to be the change-makers we all need. Unified, we can make a difference. ■

Aruba Faruque is a 17-year-old climate and environmental activist studying in high school. She is based in Bangladesh. She can be reached at aruab.faruque@yahoo.com

“ The call to action is urgent: it's time to give children and adolescents especially girls seats at every table, from local discussions to global stages ”



UNSPLASH

Youth in Climate Action

“We Have a Dream”: The Aspirations of Youth Towards a Sustainable Future and COP 28

■ Joyee Chakma and Naznine Nahar

“Youth is a dream, a form of chemical madness.”
F. Scott Fitzgerald, *Tales of the Jazz Age*

Whenever we think of someone as a youth, the picture in front of us comes off as an individual with bright eyes, big dreams and a will to change the world. But as youths age with time, do dream in their bright eyes get old too? And It is harder to dream these days rather there is an “eco anxiety” when news and declaration from the UN Secretary-General António Guterres looks like this, “the era of global warming has ended” and “the era of global boiling has arrived.” One of the most significant forces influencing young people’s lives today and in the future is climate change. This is particularly true in

developing nations with fast population expansion and large youth concentrations. Following review by the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies, the data was made available by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics. Currently, there are 16.98 crore people in the world, and 27.96% of them are between the ages of 15 and 29. Youth made up 26.4% of the population, which according to the most recent poll totaled 14.98 crore. In a country where almost half of the population are youth, are things going the way they are supposed to be, maybe or maybe not! As a country we have a long history of Youth Movements where Youths played a vital role in making a change. Bangladesh’s youth were heavily involved in a number of historical movements and events, including the Language Movement in 1952, the Six Points Movement in 1966, the Mass Upsurge in 1969, and the legendary Liberation War.

The history of the country has been formed by their sacrifices and efforts. Through active involvement in social, political, and economic activities, Bangladeshi youth have significantly influenced the development of the country. Positive improvements and advancement have been made as a result of their devotion, enthusiasm, and dedication in many different fields. Now the new challenge for the Youth is Climate Change and their activity regarding climate change. COP(Conference

“ At the end of the day, combating climate change requires an all-encompassing strategy that involves several stakeholders from various fields ”

of Parties) which plays one of the important role in navigating the dynamics of Climate Change and this year COP 28 comes with a new hope for the youth. COP28 President-Designate Dr Sultan Al Jaber emphasized this years COP as the biggest ever young climate delegate program where a pavilion specifically for indigenous peoples, and a record number of mayors and local leaders who are pushing climate action at the sub-national level will all be present at COP28, making it the most inclusive conference ever. The COP28 Presidency has outlined an action plan with the goal of implementing the greatest objectives for negotiated results with a comprehensive action agenda. The Presidency has requested action from governments and significant climate stakeholders in four areas:

Reducing emissions and accelerating the energy transition before 2030. To achieve the “essential” phase-down of fossil fuels, it is necessary to double energy efficiency measures, triple the output of renewable energy sources to 11,000 gigawatts, and produce 180 million tons of hydrogen annually by 2030.

Improving climate financing by keeping past commitments and supporting “climate-positive development” in the Global South has to get particular attention if developing countries are to have access to the affordable and readily accessible climate funding necessary to promote an equitable transition.

Focusing climate action on environment, people, lives, and livelihoods in adaptation efforts.

Mobilizing to make COP 28 as the most diverse and inclusive.

COP 28 President Designates recent visit to Bangladesh and meeting the Youths at the event on 20th July 2023 “Meeting the winners of Zayed Sustainability Prize” can be said as a way forward for Bangladesh’s youth voice echoing in the platform of Climate Change. During his speech he emphasized to

the youth present there as “Let’s mobilize to deliver super-charged solutions and ambitious outcomes. And let’s restore hope through unity and collective action.” The ICCCAD Youth Fellows 2023 are perceiving their participation at COP28 as a chance to contribute fresh perspectives, ground-breaking ideas, and a feeling of urgency to the global climate discussions. They believe that by actively engaging as a youth representative, they would inspire decision-makers and leaders to take more daring actions to tackle climate change. They are certain that their tenacity, inventive ideas, and dedication can help their neighbourhood achieve a more sustainable future. One young person hopes that COP28 will not only acknowledge the importance of youth voices but also provide an active platform for influencing policies that promote a greener and more sustainable future for all. COP28’s objectives are to offer fresh perspectives, push for practical solutions, and foster cross-disciplinary collaboration. They are also emphasizing on the promotion of adaptability and resilience, particularly in difficult geographical areas where the relevance of specific inclusive policies addressing the crisis of Indigenous communities are needed. They place a strong emphasis on the need for financial assistance for visible and structural mitigation actions as well as green business possibilities to empower young people working in agriculture.

It will be a long battle for the Youths of Bangladesh and for the Youths rest of the world in Climate Change dynamics. The world politics may be frustrating and infuriating while neglecting the Youths demand around climate change but at the end of the day the Youths must keep themselves upskilled by educating themselves with research and development skills, strong climatic expertise, diplomatic abilities and comprehension of complex organizational or sociopolitical institutions geared towards climate action. At the end of the day, combating climate change requires an all-encompassing strategy that involves several stakeholders from various fields. For youth to handle challenging circumstances with perseverance and patience and come to genuine agreement, they must acquire leadership and negotiating abilities. As Martin Luther King says, “Standing up for what is right can be scary, and even dangerous, when there are powerful people who don’t like what you have to say.” ■

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Farzana Faruk Jhumu

Climate change is a global challenge affecting everyone in one way or another. Youths are facing the worst impact of it, while the historical contribution in emissions didn't come from them. It is impacting our water, land, air, food, everything. As the impact of climate change becomes increasingly evident, the active participation of young individuals in addressing this urgent issue is more crucial than ever.

Climate change doesn't have a border. So the emission by the global north (historically and socio-economically rich countries) is causing sufferings in the global south. Like the problem, we, the people significantly impacted, are also connected. When the current Typhoon Doksuri hit the Philippines, anxiety also hit youth activists in Bangladesh. We seek hope through climate action, while the negotiation process fails us in many ways. We are not just the beneficiaries but agents of change in international conferences like COP (conference of parties) and other climate spaces. We are the present and future scientists, architects, engineers, farmers even negotiators in those processes.

As a UNICEF youth advocate and with other civil society organizations, I got several opportunities to join climate conferences to spread my activism and advocacy for the climate. In these spaces, I got the space to share my thoughts as a youth activist from Bangladesh. The process helps me determine who will be our target and allies and what topics I should focus on. It helps me learn about our work within the UN process to ensure a more sustainable future.

Youth are not taking a seat inside the negotiation rooms; some of us are spreading the truth about climate change and the real causes of emissions. Throughout the past century, human actions, encompassing activities like burning fossil fuel (coal, gas, and oil), deforestation, and livestock farming, have released enormous amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere, causing the global temperature to rise and changing the climate. But, not all humans release the same amount of greenhouse gas (known as their carbon footprint). The wealthiest 1% of the world's population is responsible for over twice the amount of carbon dioxide emissions than the poorest 50%. And around 90% of the total global CO₂ emissions come from fossil fuel industries.

Many youth organizations built the Fridays For Future movement in 2018 to call out this. As a member of Fridays for Future MAPA (Most Affected People and Areas), I have always pushed for a just, equitable, and fossil-free world. Youth are also leading the innovations to combat climate change; they are putting their energy and resources into designing sustainable technologies and innovative adaptive solutions. In Bangladesh, I met some youth working on green entrepreneurship and building green skills.

As youth is the most diverse category, we are always open



Farzana speaking in the March on Subsidiary bodies meeting (SB58) in Bonn Germany (9 June 2023) @david_adelmann

Rising Voices: The Power of Youth Action in Tackling Climate Change



Farzana in the panel discussion of COP27 @UNICEF

to discussing the intersectional issues amplified by climate change. My work with UNICEF focuses on child rights violations. With UN women feminist action for climate justice coalition, we focus on vulnerability of women because of climate change. I represent Bangladesh in many forums and conferences to bring the story of resilience and local led solutions we have.

We can't solve the climate crisis in silos without addressing economic, social, and energy justice. If we can't educate the youth for the future transition towards less-carbon solutions, we might lose the opportunities to work the demographic dividend we have. Companies and industries need to include young workers in their transition toward sustainability. Government should offer micro-credits to the youth who is working in green business. Green jobs should be more accessible to youth. Climate solutions should get technical support from the government, and false solutions need to be stopped without more tangible research. Research facilities need to be more funded to create solution-based green jobs. My fellow youth colleagues and friends should start looking for innovative ways to work on circular economies and call out polluters. Altogether, we can make the world sustainable economically and environmentally.

Any suggestion that you would like to share for COP28? Like your expectations at COP28? ■

Farzana Faruk Jhumu (She/Her) is a climate activist from Fridays for Future, Bangladesh. She is a youth currently living in Dhaka, Bangladesh. She is also a co-founder of Kaathpencil, an organization for teaching the unprivileged children of her area. Farzana's journey against the climate crisis started in 2017. But she joined Fridays for Future, Bangladesh, in 2019. Bangladesh is a severely affected country, and Dhaka is one of the most densely polluted cities, so she has to engage in climate activism. She is the youth advocate of UNICEF Bangladesh and coordinates with Fridays for Future MAPA (Most Affected People and Areas) and Fridays for Future International. She is also working on coordinating Fossil fuel non-proliferation Treaty. She is a member of the feminist action coalition for climate justice with UN women. She is currently working with 350 Bangladesh to campaign for a green new deal in Bangladesh.



Rays of Resilience: The Remarkable Journey of Urban Youth Tackling Heatwaves Head-On

Nowreen Tasnim

In the bustling metropolis of Dhaka, a group of young minds emerged, bound together by a shared vision - to confront the rising spectre of heatwaves and extreme weather with unwavering resolve. As disaster management students at the University of Dhaka, we knew that the clock was ticking, and we could not afford to stand idle. This was not just another research project; it was a profound calling to make a difference where it mattered most - in the lives of our fellow citizens.

Armed with courage and determination, we set out to empower our community and weave a tapestry of resilience to withstand the challenges of climate change. The city streets echoed our footsteps as we ventured into schools, eager to share our knowledge and awaken a sense of responsibility among the young generation. Through 5 comprehensive sessions across various schools (3 for school-going youth and 2 for underprivileged youth), we touched the lives of over 1000 students, enlightening them about the impacts of extreme weather and the importance of preparedness. But we knew that plain lectures would not suffice. We needed to ignite a fire within their hearts, to instil a deep love and understanding of our planet.

“ We felt the weight of responsibility but were buoyed by the support of one another ”

Drawing inspiration from the mesmerizing tales of our planet's natural wonders, we crafted enchanting stories that unfolded like magical journeys. Each story was carefully designed to transport young minds from the concrete jungle to the majesty of the natural world. With every story, we sowed the seeds of empathy, compassion, and connection to our delicate ecosystem. But our mission extended beyond the classroom walls. We envisioned a city where everyone was equipped to brave the heatwaves with resilience and knowledge. We organized vibrant workshops and interactive ses-

sions, transforming learning into a joyous adventure. Through captivating games and activities, we nurtured a sense of solidarity and collective purpose among the children.

With the support of benevolent sponsors, we adorned each young climate warrior with a heat-protective cotton hat and a plant that doubled as symbols of their newfound commitment. These symbolic gestures, perhaps, but one that left an indelible mark on their young hearts. Our hearts swelled with pride as we witnessed the kids taking charge of their future. Armed with saplings, they embarked on a mission to plant trees, embracing the role of young guardians of the environment. Their enthusiasm knew no bounds, and they proved that age was no barrier to becoming agents of change. But we knew that the most significant impact lay beyond the city's glimmering facade. The underprivileged communities were the unsung heroes of our tale - they faced the harshest brunt of the heatwaves, yet their resilience and hope were unwavering. We knew we had to reach out, to share our knowledge and care. In the heart of their humble settlements, we conducted sessions with humility and empathy. We listened to their stories, their struggles, and their dreams. We didn't just teach; we learned from them, weaving their experiences into the fabric of our cause.

As our journey unfolded, we realized that we were not just shaping resilient communities but creating a family of climate champions. We felt the weight of responsibility but were buoyed by the support of one another. Together, we painted the canvas of our urban landscape with hues of compassion, hope, and action. For each of us, this remarkable journey was a turning point. We transcended from students to architects of change, from young dreamers to climate warriors. We discovered that when the youth rise together, united by purpose, a symphony of transformation echoes through the city's heart. This is not just a story; it is a testament to the power of the human spirit. It is a tale of how ordinary young minds can create an extraordinary impact. Together, we pledged to continue our journey, to stand as beacons of resilience against the storm of climate change. For in the end, the true legacy we leave behind is not in the grand gestures, but in the footprints we etch on the sands of time. Let our story be an inspiration to all - that when urban youth rise strong and unwavering, the rays of resilience pierce through the darkest clouds, igniting hope in the hearts of all who dare to dream of a safer, greener, and more compassionate world. ■

Nowreen Tasnim is currently studying in her third year at the Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies, University of Dhaka. She is a Youth Fellow at the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD). Her research interests include climate change, environmental science, disaster management, and development studies. She can be contacted at nowreentasnim.17@gmail.com.

Tale of Toxic Tannery Tragedy: Youths Unite for Water Justice



Exploring BSCIC Tannery Estate to gain insights from ground-level stakeholder engagement

Rayhana Akter, D M Salah Mahmud, and Fahmida Hasan Tanha

“Everything gets polluted if the river water is polluted.”- Narayan Das (28), one of the remaining local fishermen of the Dhaleswari River, showed us a profound truth that resonates with our existence. Once revered as the lifeblood of civilizations, rivers now bear the burden of humanity’s relentless pursuit of progress. The once majestic Buriganga River is haunting evi-

dence of our actions’ consequences. According to the Rivers and Delta Research Centre (RDRC), in the past four decades, rivers in Bangladesh have suffered extreme pollution, with a shocking 56 rivers pushed to the brink. Dhaka bears the brunt, with 19 of the most polluted rivers running through its hearts. Industrial pollution emerges as a primary culprit. Therefore, this article unfolds the tannery industry’s deadly grip on the two major rivers while spotlighting the unwavering advocacy of determined youths for Dhaleswari River conservation.



Workshop for knowledge dissemination on river ecosystem challenges in collaboration with mekATeam

Leather Ladder

Bangladesh's leather industry, despite its pollution concerns, stands tall as a significant contributor to economic prosperity, accounting for 4% of the nation's exports. The commerce ministry envisions elevating leather's export earnings from under \$1 billion to an impressive \$10-12 billion by 2030. However, foreign buyers seek ethical and environmentally conscious suppliers certified by the Leather Working Group. Only three Bangladeshi companies hold this esteemed accolade, underscoring the industry's pressing need to harmonize economic progress with environmental responsibility.

Tannery Timeline

Hazaribagh, once a bustling hub of leather industries, proudly stood by the Buriganga River, churning out 90-95% of the nation's leather goods since the 1950s. But behind this industrial success, a darker tale unfolded. The Buriganga, once a lifeline, suffered under the weight of untreated waste from households and tanneries, transforming into one of the planet's most polluted rivers.

Over time, voices were raised to expose tanneries' environmental harm. From recognizing tannery operations as one of the most environmentally damaging industries in 1986 to relocating the tannery industries in Hemayetpur beside the Dhaleshwari River in 2017, the country saw 31 years long bureaucratic setbacks, several deadline extensions, and persistent environmental activism.

The relocation aimed to eliminate the chaos of Hazaribagh and create a more sustainable environment. However, challenges emerged anew. The Common Effluent Treatment Plant (CETP) in the new location failed to function correctly, leaving released untreated wastewater into the Dhaleshwari River. Adding to the woes, local authorities' shortcomings in assessments and monitoring exacerbated the situation. Consequently, the Dhaleshwari River now confronts toxic heavy

“ The relocation aimed to eliminate the chaos of Hazaribagh and create a more sustainable environment ”

metal contamination, endangering the ecosystem and community health. Furthermore, once a thriving source of fishing, the river now sees only a handful of fishermen, as the majority has switched to alternative occupations. Despite the relocation professor Mashura Shammi considers the relocation a mere risk transfer from Hazaribagh to Hemayetpur.

Navigating Climate Crisis and SDG-6

Looking through the lens of climate change and SDG-6, the interlinked gravity of this issue becomes apparent. A study

from Hong Kong reveals that, as river water quality worsens, CO₂ and CH₄ concentrations skyrocket tenfold, while N₂O levels surge fifteen times. According to Environmental Performance Index (EPI), Bangladesh ranks 141 in wastewater treatment among 180 countries. Furthermore, SDG target 6.3 focuses on improving water bodies with ambient water quality by reducing pollution and wastewater treatment. With only 18% of wastewater being treated, Bangladesh must double the speed to meet the target by 2030. Additionally, as Dhaka swelters in urban heat, conserving our waterways has become crucial more than ever to tame rising temperatures.

Flowing Dreams: Uniting Youth for Water Justice

“The stage at Buriganga is now, Dhaleshwari has not yet reached that stage, but it will not take much time to get there. The more active we are, the faster the solution will come”. With this ray of hope from Noman Mahmood, a local journalist, and the urgent crisis background, a group of youths has started an advocacy initiative, “Flow for Future.” As a part of the National Geographic Society & the Nature Conservancy seed fund, the team is working on activating youths for effective river advocacy.

The project’s first workshop, “Workshop on River Game,” was arranged with mekATeam at Jahangirnagar University on July 25. Fifty eager youths participated in the workshop. The session aimed to raise awareness about rivers’ ecological significance and the challenges river communities face. Participants learned about rivers’ evolution since the 1900s, covering industrialization, the green revolution, urbanization, dam construction, and climate change through interactive role-playing games. The workshop aimed to make youths aware of the crucial link between rivers and humanity, stressing the importance of conserving rivers for our survival. Another focus of this project is to bridge gaps between tannery stakeholders, youths, and local communities, fostering effective collaboration in critical areas. Therefore, the project seeks to host an infographics competition and seminar, inviting industry experts to allow youth to visually depict their communities’ river-related challenges and encourage dialogue among stakeholders. Furthermore, our project seeks to ignite a sense of urgency among policymakers to implement efficient effluent treatment plants, enforce laws strictly and invest in sustainable leather production. Policymakers should prioritize investing in youth seed projects to foster continuous advocacy, enable research and monitoring initiatives, and support community-led freshwater conservation efforts.

As the clock ticks in this urgent race against time to prevent the Dhaleshwari River from becoming the country’s second deadliest, we, the youths, passionately call upon the policymakers and industrialists to bring about immediate and visible action. Though the journey of tannery relocation has spanned over three decades, we hold onto hope. With col-

“ Another focus of this project is to bridge gaps between tannery stakeholders, youths, and local communities, fostering effective collaboration in critical areas ”

laborative advocacy and the environmental investment of industrialists, we can envision a future where the Dhaleshwari River proudly stands as a shining example of coexisting ecological conservation and economic development while thriving hand in hand. ■

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Young people engaging in a discussion with a Policymaker at the National Parliament of Bangladesh

- Youth Policy Forum

Elevating the Role of Youth in the Shaping of Climate Policy in Bangladesh

Against the backdrop of intensifying climate crises, many young Bangladeshi climate activists have burst onto the world stage through climate protest and awareness on regional challenges and innovations, adding a powerful dimension to calls for change. Despite their contributions, these agents of change find themselves relegated to the fringes when it comes to climate policy and decision-making, and this is a problem shared by youths globally.

A 2021 Plan International study conducted with young people from 37 countries (including Bangladesh) has found that although 86% of youths have taken some form of climate action, only 6% have participated in national or international policy processes. This strikingly contrasts with 8 in 10 young people saying they want to participate in climate policy, underscoring their eagerness to influence the choices that will shape their futures, while a lack of existing framework deters their participation.

There is a strategic urgency and incentive to include youths in the climate policy arena in Bangladesh. Young people are grossly underrepresented in the national parliament where only 1% are under age 30 and 6% under 40. This results in limited youth perspectives, lower prioritization of youth specific climate issues and reduced ambition in climate commitments, which naturally leads to growing frustration among the youths. Aside from domestic climate policies, there is a lack of youth representation in the international negotiation processes as well. Currently, youths either pay out of pocket or seek funding throughout the year to attend international climate conferences as observers with minimal involvement in the actual negotiations. While we conduct youth consultations as part of stakeholder engagement during the development of a climate policy, efforts must go beyond that to involve young people more meaningfully throughout different stages of the policy process, including agenda setting, design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

In this regard, a good case study would be Youth Policy Forum (YPF), a youth-led policy organization in Bangladesh that engages in policy research, dialogue and advocacy with a goal to narrow the gap between Bangladeshi youth and policymakers. The young members at YPF are trained in the different stages of the policy process, climate change negotiations and latest climate science and developments, with lectures delivered by leading parliamentarians and experts. The organization's Environment and Climate Change Network is led by a young group of individuals who work with experts to localize global climate discourses, research climate vulnerable regions and propose evidence-based inclusive policy recommendations to national policymakers.

While we can expect young parliamentarians to share the urgency of the climate crisis, electing them into the national

“ The organization's Environment and Climate Change Network is led by a young group of individuals who work with experts to localize global climate discourses ”

parliament is a protracted political process. Although efforts should be made in that regard, we need quicker alternatives that can put the voices of the youth in a democratic framework that holds binding implications. Many countries have started realizing the potential of formalizing youth participation in the decision making process. Chile has formalized two spots for a young man and women as a long-standing mechanism in the Chilean delegation team to the Conference of Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) Negotiations. The country has also developed a school to train young negotiators for Latin America and the Caribbeans. Switzerland recently introduced a Climate Youth Delegate in its COP delegation team who is elected for a period of two years, where the first eighteen months are spent representing Swiss youth at the international and national policy levels and in the last six months, coaching the new youth delegate. Youths in Mexico,

Zimbabwe and France are also working towards achieving similar formalization processes.

Youth National Climate Councils are also an emerging mechanism where young people advise environmental ministries on domestic climate change policies. For example, the Danish Youth Climate Council sits with the Ministry of Climate twice a year to discuss proposals which are made public through media channels to ensure transparency and accountability.

Keeping in mind the existing mechanisms, some recommendations can be made for Bangladesh. Firstly, we need to create a binding process to institutionalize youth participation in climate policy. This can be achieved through the establishment of an autonomous National Youth Climate Council representing young people from diverse backgrounds, particularly marginalized communities. With a goal to channel inputs from young people in the country to the national climate policies and action plans, the council should have a broad mandate to mainstream climate into other sectoral policies, including those related to energy, transportation, health, and education. A few priority working areas should be climate education, green jobs for youths entering the labor market, supporting green businesses and youth-led climate innovations, assisting youth organizations to meet legal requirements to make access to resources easier, and perhaps most importantly, monitoring and evaluation of government climate policies.

Secondly, Bangladeshi youths need to be prepared to participate meaningfully in the UNFCCC negotiations as part of the country delegation, allowing them to advance the national climate agenda in the multilateral arena. This means training them on UNFCCC functions, the Paris Agreement and the negotiation groups with a focus on specific national and regional challenges. Here, youths have an important role to promote the invaluable lessons from Bangladesh's climate change adaptation journey. Their participation should not just be limited to COP but should extend to other critical negotiations hosted under the convention, such as sessions of the Subsidiary Body for Scientific and Technological Advice (SBSTA) and Subsidiary Body for Implementation (SBI) where many key decisions on the global climate agenda are shaped ahead of COP.

Youths are best-positioned to advocate for future-oriented policies and alternatives to the current dominant structures that often perpetuate business as usual. A total lack of youth involvement will create an adult-youth divide and could have lasting impacts on young people's development as citizens, but elevating their role as policymakers and negotiators will create a shared decision-making climate space, paving the way for more inclusive and forward looking policies for Bangladesh. ■

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“ Their participation should not just be limited to COP but should extend to other critical negotiations hosted under the convention ”

Rising from the Frontlines: Youth Catalyze Global Action at COP28

Sohanur Rahman

Sohanur Rahman: In the face of an unprecedented climate crisis, the entire world is grappling with the consequences of ages of fossil fuel addiction, leading to an era of global boiling. The climate emergency bell rings incessantly, demanding immediate and decisive action from global leaders to confront the escalating challenges we face. Amid this urgent call, young people have emerged as a powerful force, refusing to be silenced. We, the young climate activists, are not mere social media influencers seeking attention; we are a generation driven by action, committed to tackling the negative challenges posed by climate change.



Youth led action at the flood devastated Char YouthNet village, Kurigram

- Photo Courtesy

Bangladesh's Resilient Youth Climate Movement

Bangladesh, a nation deeply impacted by global climate change, has witnessed firsthand the devastating consequences- from loss of lives and cultural heritage to widespread environmental destruction. In the face of this adversity, the young people of Bangladesh have risen to the forefront of the fight against climate change, with a clear mission to safeguard a sustainable future for all.

In 2016, driven by our own experiences of climatic devastation, we founded the YouthNet for Climate Justice, a prominent movement-based platform in Bangladesh. Our unwavering dedication has led us to tirelessly raise awareness, foster environmental consciousness, and directly engage with policymakers to advocate for ambitious climate policies and a just energy transition from fossil fuels. Our relentless efforts even resulted in the Bangladesh parliament declaring a “Planetary Emergency” motion in 2019, acknowledging the gravity of the crisis and the urgent need for action. At the forefront of our campaigns is the pivotal mission to halt coal-based power plants in vulnerable coastal regions. Recognizing the disastrous impact of such projects on communities, our youth-led movement has successfully influenced policy decisions and compelled businesses to embrace corporate responsibility and sustainability. Despite facing challenges, the resilience of Bangladesh's youth climate activists remains unyielding.

Local Youth-led Action, Global Impact

We exemplify the power of collective determination, inspiring others worldwide to join the fight against climate change through peaceful protests, impactful social media

campaigns, strategic advocacy and grassroots initiatives such as responding to disaster-affected communities and leading local adaptation efforts. Moreover, in the wake of catastrophic flash floods in Sylhet and Sunamganj last year, our young

“ We exemplify the power of collective determination, inspiring others worldwide to join the fight against climate change through peaceful protests ”

volunteers took the lead in providing essential assistance to the hardest-hit women and girls, underscoring the potential of local action to create a global impact. Recognizing the ongoing vulnerability of Char YouthNet village in Kurigram district, we have established a youth-led initiative aimed at empowering local youth and engaging relevant stakeholders. By fostering sustainable strategies to reduce vulnerabilities and



Young panellists and guests of the climate session at the Women Deliver Conference, Kigali, Rwanda

- Photos Courtesy

enhance resilience, the initiative promotes inclusivity, WASH improvement, and nutrition within the community, working diligently to strengthen their resilience and mitigate the devastating impact of future flash floods in the region.

Amplifying Youth Voices: COP28 and Climate Deliver

As the 28th Conference of the Parties (COP28) approaches, this moment becomes an unparalleled opportunity to amplify youth voices on the global stage. Youth activists from Bangladesh and beyond urge world leaders to prioritize climate action, delivery of the climate pledges and enhance international cooperation in the face of this existential threat.

During the recent Women Deliver Conference (WD2023) in Kigali, Rwanda, I had the incredible opportunity to present youth co-created and co-led research findings partnering with the Population Council, which focused on adolescents' experiences in the climate crisis. Our study amplified the voices of 95 young participants from diverse regions of Bangladesh, including Barishal, Khulna, Satkhira, Kurigram, and Sunamganj. The research findings shed light on the gendered impacts of climate change, spanning areas such as education, health, migration, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), mental health, nutrition, and WASH. Additionally, the multinational research project covered Guatemala and Nigeria, providing invaluable insights into adolescent views and experiences on climate change. By incorporating the perspectives of young people from different regions, our research underscores the importance of including young voices in climate policy discussions, considering young people as the current leader and providing adequate financing to youth led organization to pave the way for a more sustainable and equitable future.

Youth for our Planet: Advocating for a Just Transition

The COP28 x Women Deliver: Youth for our Planet event held in the Youth Zone of WD2023 was a remarkable showcase of the power of young voices as drivers of transformational change in the fight against climate change. During the event, I am with some youth climate activists from diverse regions and backgrounds came together to lead a panel discussion, demanding concrete climate action from global leaders and holding them accountable for their commitments on mitigation and climate finance.

Our generation emphasizes the urgency of a gender-just transition and the need to bridge the climate finance gap while operationalizing the Loss and Damage fund by COP28. We highlight the importance of youth co-leadership in shaping the future we want for the planet and its people, advocating for more space at the negotiation table. The breakout room discussions, moderated by youth activists, explored the intersection of climate, gender, food, and finance. The event underscored the significance of addressing interconnected issues holistically and provided valuable insights that will be incorporated into the Women Deliver Youth Declaration to the COP28 presidency.

The Imperative of Bold Climate Action at COP28

Road to COP28, the urgency of bold climate action cannot be overstated. Climate justice must be at the center, recognizing the unequal burden placed on vulnerable communities by the impacts of climate change. To enable a sustainable future, increased financial support is crucial for developing nations transitioning to eco-friendly practices and adapting to climate challenges. Governments must embrace renewable energy solutions while leaving fossil fuels behind, as a carbon-neutral world is not a choice but an imperative for humanity's survival. For COP28 to be truly impactful, meaningful youth representation is essential. The COP28 Presidency must provide comprehensive training and education for young activists, fostering collaboration between youth champions and youth centers for sustainable outcomes beyond the conference. Equally important is ensuring the necessary support for young climate activists, including funding, residency arrangements, and timely visas to amplify unheard and inclusive voices from the frontlines at the COP28 in Dubai.

“ Our generation emphasizes the urgency of a gender-just transition and the need to bridge the climate finance gap while operationalizing the Loss and Damage fund by COP28 ”

A Turning Point for Our Planet

The world stands at a critical juncture in the fight against the climate crisis. The success of COP28 hinges on genuinely considering and incorporating the perspectives and proposals of youth and civil society. Young climate activists from Bangladesh and beyond stand united, driven by determination and hope. The world is watching you. Let COP28 be the watershed moment when the world witnesses the power of young voices leading the charge for climate action. The world is watching, and the time to act is now! ■

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