

Vulnerable communities demand climate justice

Climate change will affect almost all aspects of their development process. Hence incorporation of climate change into development is not a choice, but an obligation for their survival, particularly in LDCs, SIDS and the poor countries of Africa.

ATIQ RAHMAN

THE COP-15 Summit in Copenhagen is aimed at implementing the Bali Action Plan as well as ensuring a credible follow up to the Kyoto Protocol. Many meetings across the world, of heads of governments, climate change negotiators, civil society groups, activists and the scientific community, are calling for the implementation of the Bali Action Plan. At the Copenhagen Bella Centre the parties to the UNFCCC Conference of Parties and the Meeting of the Parties to the Kyoto Protocol must seal a deal that significantly reduces greenhouse gases, and save the most vulnerable from increasing climate risks.

The recent catastrophic and extreme climate events across the world, including cyclones in the Bay of Bengal, typhoons and floods in Philippines and China, floods in UK, droughts in Africa and hurricanes in the Caribbean and Central America -- all seem to confirm the worst predictions of IPCC Fourth Assessment Report.

The recent global food crisis and virtual disappearance of the global rice market point towards greater forthcoming food related crises. This is also consistent with the impacts of climate change. The sufferers of all these are mostly the poor communities across the world.

A recent FAO report suggests that currently one billion people go hungry everyday. Three factors responsible for this are market failure, poor global governance and impacts of climate change. In fact, climate change itself represents one of the greatest economic and market failures in the history and is also a failure of global governance.

Annex-1 must act now

The industrialised countries must take the responsibility for financing the global regime of the GHG reduction and adaptation, and for providing technologies. Any serious effort to raise a significant global fund is often answered by the knee-jerk reaction that industrialised governments have no funds. But recent history testifies otherwise.

When the recent financial crisis became evident due to callous, irresponsible mismanagement of a number of sectors, including banking, insurance, housing etc., trillions of dollars flowed as economic stimulus. Huge funds were made available in US, European countries, Japan, China and other countries to save those financial institutions that

mostly supported the rich and demonstrated irresponsible financial management.

So when the rich suffer, funds are found but when the poor suffer and are bound to continue to suffer due to impacts of climate change, funds are not available.

It is a question of urgency, priority and decision. Copenhagen must see huge funds on the table and this deal must also be sealed.

Climate victims

The victims of today and tomorrow are the poor across the world, particularly in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs). The leaders of the LDCs and Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and poor countries of Africa are amplifying their voices through the formation of an informal emerging group of the most vulnerable countries (MVC). Their communities are already suffering from sea level rise, food shortages, human displacement and increasing threats of social conflicts.

Greatest strategic threat

Climate change is rapidly emerging as the greatest strategic threat. Over three hundred million people, mostly from the developing world, are likely to be displaced. The industrialised countries, who are mostly responsible for the forthcoming climate change catastrophe, must bear the responsibility of rehabilitating these displaced people in the geographical areas of their own respective countries.

This migration challenge is going to be even greater than some of the climate related extreme events. So, time is running out fast for completing a "just" and "legally binding" deal at Copenhagen. This agreement must ensure:

- Rapid reduction of GHG by the industrialised countries within shortest time possible,
- A massive (at least one hundred billion dollars annually) fund where more than 50% should be allocated for adaptation, particularly for most vulnerable communities and poor countries,
- Provision of required technologies for free or at a concessional rate, both for mitigation and for adaptation, from industrialised countries to developing countries, and
- Starting the process for managing massive climate induced migration.

Limit to adaptation

Adaptation is the need for today, but

cannot be a long term solution of climate change. The imperative of GHG emission forces many communities to adapt to agricultural productivity, infrastructural damage management, public health protection, disaster risk reduction and climate induced migration. But adaptation has limits.

The adaptation potential comes to an end when ecosystems or human societies collapse. Hence, we must build resilience in human and natural systems to reduce the risk and vulnerability from climate change impacts through reducing the GHG emission drastically and providing risk reduction strategies and actions.

Climate politics: Poor US leadership

US was the greatest stumbling block in achieving the Kyoto Protocol objectives in relation to GHG reduction. The change in the administration and the emergence of Obama indicates some progress. But the legislative requirements of the decision making process of US have blocked the global progress of a climate change deal. US's recent offer of a 17% reduction of GHG by 2020 from a baseline of 2005 does not deceive the world. This is equivalent to less than 5% reduction from 1990 level.

This basically means that US intends to achieve the Kyoto target of 5% reduction of 2012 by 2025. This is a great and grave injustice that US has done to planetary decision making, and has lost credibility as a world leader.

Europe: Early efforts

The European Union committed to reduce 20% by 2020 from the baseline of 1990, which also falls far short of the IPCC requirements as the impacts of climate change are happening so fast that we will reach a tipping point in the near future. China, the greatest future emitter (though currently a global average per capita emitter) has declared its own carbon development index, which will need further carbon reduction and decarbonisation of its development process.

Emerging economics, LDCs and MVCs

The very recent meeting of the four major developing country emitters (China, India, Brazil and South Africa) was right to call on industrial countries to reduce GHG, but they also have to demonstrate their sincerity and commitment for GHG reduction.

The LDCs and most vulnerable countries (MVCs) should also explore low-carbon sustainable development paths and enhance their adaptive capacities to reduce climate risks and vulnerabilities.

For this, a major funding drive must be one of the key objectives of the Copenhagen deal. The \$10 billion mentioned in the Commonwealth Summit and the earlier announcement of \$1 hundred billion per year up to 2020 by the UK Prime Minister Gordon Brown are



Will the vulnerable get crushed?

merely numbers, but must be realised in the Copenhagen deal.

Also preferential access to this fund by the most vulnerable and poor communities must be ascertained. Fund management has a frustrating history for poor countries, and must be managed independently, efficiently urgently and in a pro-poor manner under the guidance of the UNFCCC.

Both poor and rich must adapt

The experiences from adaptation practices and country-based actions show that adaptation will be context specific but its learnings will have generic value. Pro-poor and climate risk reducing practices must be the focus of adaptation investment. The achievements of poverty eradication efforts must be protected from the cruel hands of climate change impacts. The threats faced by the farmers of today due to erratic rainfall, enhanced flooding, droughts and cyclones sometimes make their knowledge accumulated from previous generations non-functional.

New knowledge continuum

A new knowledge continuum must emerge, which will connect local experiential knowledge with the global scientific knowledge of climate change. The rapidity with which climate change impacts are being manifested makes this new knowledge accumulation urgent and challenging.

Hence, there is a need for collaborative and participatory research where multidisciplinary scientific community will work with the vulnerable communities and innovate appropriate responses, technologies and processes.

The poorest pay the highest costs

The poorest are paying the highest costs with their lives, livelihood and health risks. The developing countries are waiting for resources to mainstream climate change into their development process. A lot needs to be done in this area in each country. Climate change will affect almost all aspects of their development process. Hence incorporation of climate change into development is not a choice, but an obligation for their survival, particularly in LDCs, SIDS and the poor countries of Africa.

Mitigation first and adaptation too

The industrialised countries must lead by example in rapid and drastic mitigation, resource contribution, technology transfer and capacity building of the poor and vulnerable countries. Any delay in doing so will cost them heavily in the near future.

In Copenhagen, the parties must decide on a fair and just deal. The risks of failure will be costly, not only for the poor but also for the rich, who face unprecedented instabilities in one global system. Climate change is a global phenomena and Copenhagen must succeed in a global deal, including all states with no exception or renegades.

Copenhagen: A key milestone

The Copenhagen Summit will come and go. It is a milestone. Success will depend on the sagacity, sincerity and seriousness of the global leaders. The days of hiding behind, or sitting on, the fence are over. As Ban Ki-moon, UN Secretary General,

recently said: "We have read the science. Global warming is real, and we are a prime cause. [...] We must set an agenda - create a roadmap to the future, coupled with a timeline that produces a deal by 2009. In this, it helps to have a vision of how the future might look if we succeed."

Such milestones have come and gone, in Rio De Janeiro in 1992, at Kyoto in 1997, in Johannesburg in 2002 and in Bali in 2007. Aspirations were created and frustrated time and again. A few rich countries are beneficiaries of the GHG emission. The victims of GHG accumulation and consequent impacts are becoming more visible. Frustration, because of indecision and inaction by the US and inadequate actions by the other industrialised (Annex 1) countries, is increasing. If this frustration is not contained, the global community will face severe conflicts and greater instability.

Get a deal or face destabilisation

The destabilisation will not spare the rich. So we must seal a fair and just deal in Copenhagen. The basis for this is a "climate justice framework." Continued, urgent and sustainable efforts, rapid GHG reduction, significant fund and technology transfer from developed to developing countries and protection of the most vulnerable are the essential criteria of a fair climate deal. History will judge the success of the Copenhagen Summit. We all either swim, or sink, together. Copenhagen is not only a challenge, it is an opportunity also. All the parties must rise to take this opportunity to make a safe and fairer world.

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BNP conference and citizens' expectation

We want them to start practicing democracy, transparency and accountability within the party hierarchy -- not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of the nation. We also hope that they will free the party from the clutches of selfishness, corruption and dynastic politics.

DR. BADIUL ALAM MAJUMDER

THE BNP's national council, to be held after nearly 16 years, has generated much interest among both party loyalists and citizen groups. Within the party, this interest is manifested in competition, often violent, for holding higher positions and influence.

The in-fighting is due to competing individual interests among the party activists. In today's Bangladesh, the primary reason for joining and being active in political parties is the receipt of patronage. It is now well known that the party in power, or coming into power, will reward its followers with benefits, both due and undue.

Key officeholders get even more benefits. With the possibilities of such payoffs in play, it is natural that self-interested people should join major parties and resort to any means, including violence, to achieve prominence. This is what has been happening within both the Awami League and the BNP.

The violent conflict within the BNP rank and file is undoubtedly scandalous. However, it is perhaps even more scandalous for the party higher-ups to deny the problem and shift the blame to the government. With so many legitimate grounds to criticise the government, it is ironic that BNP chooses to invent such disingenuous charges. This is an ugly, all-too-blant, manifestation of our bankrupt politics.

Such a blame-game must end. The first step towards solving the problem is to recognise its existence. However, by refusing to admit that it has serious con-

flicts within the party, BNP is sidestepping the need to resolve the issue. Unfortunately, avoiding an issue, as everyone knows, does not make it go away; it only allows it to become bigger and more serious in the future.

It is also well known that nowadays people rarely join our major political parties out of an attraction to their ideology or programs. They do so primarily to get a share of the pie. In fact, politics over the years has become a very profitable "business" -- a shameless get-rich-quick scheme. Slogans and symbolism, rather than ideology and principles, have now become the main tools of its trade. Thus, the principal purpose of the competition and conflict within major political parties is for aspirants to get as close as possible to the all-powerful leaders at the top.

Such closeness proportionally increases the opportunity and amount of patronage and favour.

It is no wonder, then, that so much jockeying and manipulation are the order of the day. In contrast, citizens like us are interested in BNP's convention for very different reasons. We want to see BNP learn from its past painful experiences and stay clear of the excesses and wrongdoings that led it into trouble. We want them to start practicing democracy, transparency and accountability within the party hierarchy -- not only for their own sake, but also for the sake of the nation. We also hope that they will free the party from the clutches of selfishness, corruption and dynastic politics.

As citizens, we want BNP to comply with the Representation of the People



Time to take stock anew.

Order (Amendment) Act, 2009, passed in the first session of the 9th Parliament, especially the conditions for registration of political parties. Section 90B of the amended RPO contains the conditions for such registration, the most important of which are: 90 (1) (b) "[...] political party desiring to be registered with the Commission, shall have the following specific provisions in its constitution, namely:

- To elect the members of the committees at all levels, including members of the central committee;
- To fix the goal of reserving at least 33% of all committee positions for women, including the central committee, and achieving this goal by the year 2020;
- To prohibit formation of any organisation or body as its affiliated or associated body consisting of the teachers or students of any educational institution or the employees or labourers of any financial, commercial or industrial institution or establishment, or the

members of any other profession: Provided that nothing shall prevent them from organising independently in their respective fields or forming an association, society, trade union etc. and exercising all democratic and political rights, and individual, subject to the provisions of the existing laws, to be a member of any political party;

• To finalise nomination of candidates by the central parliamentary board of the party in consideration of panels prepared by members of the ward, union, thana, upazila or district committee, as the case may be, of the concerned constituency."

Section 90C of the RPO also provides: 90 C (1) "A political party shall not be qualified for registration under this Chapter, if... (e) there is any provision in its constitution for the establishment or operation of any office, branch or committee outside the territory of Bangladesh."

file. It is also illegal to have affiliated and associated organisations of the party. In addition, it would be a violation of the law to have any branch or office of the party outside Bangladesh. It is important to note that the mere inclusion of these provisions in the party constitution is not enough -- they must be put to practice. The unfortunate truth is that foreign branches of political parties often take intra-party conflicts outside the country, badly tarnishing the image of Bangladesh.

It may be pointed out that the Awami League and Jatiya Party did not fully comply with these provisions of the RPO. Their committees were not elected; Awami League also played a very unfortunate game by designating its affiliated bodies as associated organisations, although both are illegal. Their foreign branches also still exist.

Will BNP be able to rise above this culture of non-compliance? It goes without saying that unless laws are implemented, we will not have the rule of law. Without rule of law, the rule of jungle prevails -- thus the strong prey on the weak, the rich on the poor, and the powerful on the disenfranchised. Such conditions eat away at the vitality of a nation, pushing it into a state of dysfunction.

It may be noted that, while adopting the RPO framed during the caretaker government, the 9th Parliament ratified the conditions of registration of political parties under the Election Commission, but removed the EC's authority to deregister parties for non-compliance.

By doing so, Parliament has made compliance with the conditions for registrations discretionary rather than mandatory and, in the process, has clipped the authority of the EC, turning it into a paper tiger. Note further that, during the caretaker government, the registration conditions were hammered out through many consultations between the EC and the political parties

-- they were not unilaterally imposed by the EC.

According to media reports, the BNP chairperson may designate the future leadership, rather than the leadership being elected by the councilors -- which would be a violation of the law and thus totally unacceptable. Rumours also abound that BNP will amend its constitution, more or less keeping the chairperson's power intact -- now BNP chairperson has almost absolute power and she can do and undo anything -- which will also be contrary to democratic norms.

It is clear from our past experience that, given the opportunity, power tends to concentrate, with unfettered power leading to undesirable outcomes. Such outcomes may not only be a bad omen for the party, but for the country as well.

To conclude, politicians often complain that what they do is their own business; why should some citizens be concerned about it? They infer that politics is for politicians and others should not poke their noses into it. It is obvious, however, that citizens cannot keep mum.

Political parties are not private clubs; they are constitutionally recognised entities, the effectiveness of which primarily determines whether democracy succeeds in Bangladesh. If political parties are not democratic and they are not transparent, accountable and are committed to the people's welfare, it is unrealistic to expect good and democratic governance in the country.

Furthermore, even private clubs cannot do anything they like; they must comply with prevailing laws and cannot act against public interest. Thus, the behaviour of political parties and the public welfare are inextricably tied together -- for the consequences of the irresponsibility of political parties will have to be borne not by the parties alone, but by all citizens of Bangladesh.

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