



Immediate Tasks for Bangladesh

BANGLADESH has to enhance its capacity to absorb inflow of climate change funds to implement projects for adaptation and mitigation with transparency and accountability, speakers said at a roundtable.

Noted climate change experts from government and non-government sectors emphasised the need for capacity building for international negotiations with an eye to the up coming interim meetings before COP 16 to be held in Mexico.

At the roundtable organised by The Daily Star in its conference room on January 20 on 'Post-Copenhagen: Immediate Task for Bangladesh', the speakers insisted on a review of the Copenhagen Accord by the government, to find out its loopholes and weaknesses, and to work accordingly.

Saber Hossain Chowdhury MP

Identifying the topic as very timely, Saber Hossain Chowdhury MP, the chair of all party group of parliamentarians on climate change, thanked The Daily Star for taking the initiative for the discussion.

He emphasised on thorough analysis of the Copenhagen Accord, and on adopting a national position on it.

"We should find out the weaknesses and strengths of the accord," he said.

Citing a report published in the UK, Saber Hossain said, according to the mitigation target mentioned in the accord, the world temperature will rise more than 3 degrees by the end of the century.

"So we should do a sensitivity analysis regarding what will be the difference of the impacts on Bangladesh if the temperature rises by 2 degrees and if it rises by 3 degrees," he added.

If the temperature rises that much, Saber said, it will have a huge impact on countries like Bangladesh.

"We may have to look for 15 to 20 billion dollars, if the temperature rises that much," he said.

He also emphasised on formulating Bangladesh's position on the accord in



Climate change experts take part in a roundtable on Post Copenhagen: Immediate Task for Bangladesh, organised by The Daily Star.

PHOTO: STAR



SABER HOSSAIN CHOWDHURY MP

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the future. And for that we invited project proposals, already we have received hundreds of them, and also allocated 52 crore taka to government projects last week," he announced.

The secretary said the government is emphasising on adaptation while also paying attention to mitigation. Already the government started an afforestation programme on coastal embankments built by the Water Development Board.

"We think by the end of February we will be able to utilise most of the fund," he said.

The government will soon enact the Climate Change Trust Fund Act, which will give a clear guideline for using the fund, he said.

The environment ministry will soon set up a climate change unit, and climate change cells would be opened in 12 others ministries within 15 days, he added.

Micro level government planning is going on involving different ministries, and Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) is assessing the cost of adaptation, said the secretary.

Dr Asaduzzaman

Dr Asaduzzaman, research director of BIDS, emphasised on capacity building for project implementation and for quick approval for project proposals.

Criticising the present project approval process, he said the present procedure is extremely cumbersome, lengthy, and wasteful.

"We must simplify the process," he added.

He said the government should implement MRV (measurable, reportable and verifiable) method of spending money on different projects.

He also said the government now has a little fund absorbing capacity. The Ministry of Environment and Forest absorbs no more than 15 to 20 million dollars a year.

"But in future the government might have to spend much more," he said.

If the government gets the adequate fund and builds the capacity to spend it fruitfully, then Bangladesh alone will need at least 5 billion dollars for adaptation, and another 5 billion for mitigation in the next five years, said the development expert.

"Now Bangladesh needs to show the world that we can do it," he said adding that the government should prioritise projects on the basis of needs on the ground.

He said different ministries needs to sensitise themselves regarding climate change. He suggested strengthening of ministries so they may adopt climate resilient and climate friendly development projects.

Dr Ainun Nishat

Dr Ainun Nishat, senior adviser on climate change for the International



DR AINUN NISHAT

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DR ASADUZZAMAN

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Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) Asia, said funding might also come as incentives for prevention of deforestation and for eco-friendly forest management under the UN programme for Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and Forest Degradation in Developing Countries (REDD Plus), adopted under the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC).

He said the Ministry of Environment and Forest should use as a ready reference to its afforestation plan, its own document that has already been prepared.

The Bangladesh government should immediately start the process of implementing the Copenhagen Accord, he said.

He reminded the roundtable that in the Copenhagen Accord a global climate change fund of 10 billion US dollars per year has been committed for the next three years, which will be increased to 100 billion dollars in 2020.

He urged the Bangladesh government to follow the low carbon pathway.

Definitely Bangladesh will prepare for adaptation, but at the same time the country should also think about power generation from wind and solar energy using advanced technology that has been offered for developing countries in the accord, he said.

Bangladesh should also use discretion in utilising the available climate funds for adaptation, mitigation, and cleaner technology programmes, he said.

"We must be prepared to utilise the available climate funds, but the funds will not come unless we have the capacity to utilise it," he cautioned.

The smaller groups of the least developed countries (LDCs), small island countries, and the African countries are becoming very vocal in climate negotiations within the grouping of G-77 and China, he noted.

Bangladesh, as one of the countries that are most vulnerable to the climate change impacts, should pursue an appropriate political coalition to protect its national interest in international negotiations, he said.

Dr Atiq Rahman

Dr Atiq Rahman is the executive director of Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) and one of the lead authors of the fourth report of the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

He said climate change is no more an environmental issue only; rather it is

central to development.

"So it cannot be and should not be a matter of the Ministry of Environment and Forest. It should go beyond that," he added.

It has to be integrated into the government's development activities entailing all ministries, but the challenge is how to integrate all that, he said.

"The political power of a country is crucial for effective climate change negotiations," he said adding that the grouping of G-77 and China is not exclusive for climate negotiations alone, rather it can also be equally effective for global negotiations on issues like security and disarmament.

Bangladesh has to strengthen its position within the grouping, he said. "We have to assert our capacities within the system."

"Accountability and transparency are the keywords not only in utilisation of the funds, but also for ensuring inflow of future funds," he noted adding, on the other hand, developed countries must commit to adequacy and sustainability of climate funds.

He also suggested appointing climate ambassadors to negotiate on behalf of the government.

"My suggestion is to deploy three climate ambassadors. If governments change or whatever, the climate ambassadors can negotiate on behalf of



DR ATIQ RAHMAN

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the country," he said.

He also said the government should quickly take initiatives for capacity building of its own officials and non-government officials working in the field of climate change adaptation and mitigation.

He suggested increasing the capacities of local government officials and parliamentarians as well.

He also recommended training groups of specialists on climate change adaptation and mitigation, technology transfer, and related research work.

Dr Rezaul Karim

Dr Rezaul Karim quipped, "What is the difference between failure and success of a UN resolution or a document unless it is a UN Security Council resolution?"

He went on, "If you remember Marrakech Accord that was a COP 7 decision, and was a decision for capacity building and technology transfer, that was eight years ago, and we are still discussing capacity building and technology transfer at COP 15."

But he said he is not too much disappointed with the outcome of COP 15, because it gave a lot of things to work with and a lot of things to ponder upon.

The Copenhagen Accord has many things, but it left out the mitigation aspect, he noted.

"But it still gives some parameters, although does not give the peaking time,



The government has already allocated money for social safety net for climate change victims, but did not bring that out at the Copenhagen summit.

PHOTO: SHAFIQU ALAM



DR MIHIR KANTI MAJUMDER

The government will soon enact the Climate Change Trust Fund Act, which will give a clear guideline for using the fund

relation to its position in different international and regional coalitions including the grouping of G-77 and China.

So the government needs to analyse the accord and realise whether Bangladesh should accept it, he said.

He also emphasised on increasing the capacity of the government for implementing different projects, and the monitoring capacity of the parliamentarians as well, since ultimately it is the parliamentarians who will monitor government actions.

"If we don't do that, we will not progress much," he said.

He raised a question about what will happen to the people already affected by climate change, if Bangladesh does not get fund from the international community.

"So we should take preparations for that as well," he said.

Dr Mihir Kanti Majumder

Secretary to the Ministry of Environment and Forest Mihir Kanti Majumder said the government already developed a climate change strategic and action plan with six thematic areas to work on, keeping adaptation as its main target.

The secretary said the post Copenhagen situation is crucial, and the government already initiated a discussion with the participants who had negotiated there.

About a future action plan, the secretary said the government already initiated a discussion on that too.

"We have held discussions in the ministry to review the outcome of the Copenhagen summit. And hope to arrange another meeting within 15 days to finalise the action plan," he said.

"We expect that a series of informal talks will be held before Cop 16. In Copenhagen we projected Bangladesh as the most vulnerable country in the world, and the world leaders accepted it," he added.

About the climate change fund of the government, the secretary said the government formed a fund of Tk 700 crore.

"We will be able to use 462 crore this year, because a portion will be kept for