

FOUNDER EDITOR
LATE S. M. ALI

DHAKA THURSDAY OCTOBER 20, 2016, KARTIK 5, 1423 BS

Discrimination against female farmers

Stop the exploitation

It is inexcusable that underprivileged people are forced to pay bribes or lobby with local influential people to get government services related to the food and agricultural sector. It only illustrates a level of corruption that, we believe, is quite abhorrent. Female farmers are doubly victim to the aberrant systemic injustices, not receiving just prices because of middlemen and the scheduled benefits of government services because of influential people.

Such discrimination shockingly persists despite the fact that 68.1 percent of agricultural workers - the majority - are women according to rights groups. And we agree with the chairman of the parliamentary standing committee on food ministry that given the situation, the government alone, expressed, can address the problem.

Disappointingly, however, corruption and irregularities that have crept in because of a lack of good governance are crippling such possibilities. Whereas the government should facilitate ways for female farmers to get their just return, corruption on its part only worsens their situation. Social outlook, on the other hand, also adversely affect female farmers as they have to depend on their male family members who take advantage of them. Because women cannot always go to markets, for example, men oftentimes end up enjoying all the fruits of their labour from selling the produce for them.

The entire situation is extremely disheartening. With all of this happening, how is it that we claim to have made progress in terms of empowering women in our country? The government, we expect, will make immediate course correction by ensuring that female farmers receive their rightful returns. Corruption that is denying the poor of the benefits of government services being provided using taxpayer's money in particular must be rooted out.

Unprofitable BTRC

Smacks of poor management

It is unthinkable that 1,018 out of 1,539 buses of Bangladesh Road and Transport Corporation (BTRC) earned Tk 226.93 crore in profit while Tk 220.36 crore was spent for operation and maintenance, even more so when one considers the price of each of the buses. That left a net profit of Tk 6.57 crore for BTRC in the current fiscal! We are horrified to see that the organisation has become overstaffed where a tenth of the 3,000 BTRC employees contribute nothing due to age factors and the ratio of unproductive staff is unusually high. Moreover, keeping the service operational becomes unprofitable due to high fuel costs.

Why do BTRC buses require so much repair work? One does not get the impression that any of the buses goes through periodical maintenance or repair looking at their ramshackle condition. Hence we must ask the question whether it is more profitable to run up repair bills than keep the buses on the roads. If fuel costs are too high, why not convert these buses to run on CNG? The second question is why there is no government oversight on the disproportionately large number of non-performing staff on the payroll? This of course is not acceptable. BTRC staff cannot be sitting idle while drawing monthly pay checks that add to high operational costs.

All this points to inefficiency at every stage of the management; it smacks of organised graft being orchestrated by a section of the management simply because the government's anti graft body has not bothered to take a closer look at the systemic problems BTRC is suffering from.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

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Let's football!

The defeat against Bhutan is a mournful knock to our football journey. Former footballers and football lovers all over the country have expressed their concern over the development of national football. No one can dissent that the result with Bhutan is the output of limitation and lack of planning and execution over the past ten years.

It's high time to develop our football expertise by overlooking the conflicts among former footballers. We want to believe that BFF will implement extensive plans and activities to give us, the football lovers, something to be proud of.

Md. Rashedul Islam
On email

How the government can reduce our financial burdens

Bangladesh has achieved drastic poverty reduction within 45 years of its independence. The government, NGOs and private sectors are responsible for such commendable feats.

However, more can be done to help out financially weak citizens. Source tax provision on fixed deposit income irrespective of income generation needs review. Bangladesh is lately experiencing 6 percent inflation - when the rate of inflation is deducted from interest income in real terms, depositors get no income at all from fixed deposits. Many people live on their small fixed deposits in banks or financial institutions. It becomes difficult for them to live on deposit bearing income under such circumstances.

The government can help them by withdrawing tax at source on deposit of up to BDT 1 million fixed deposits.

Md. Ashraf Hossain
On email

THE NEW URBAN AGENDA

What our cities can be

NICK BERESFORD and ASHEKUR RAHMAN

THE future is urban and nowhere is that more true than in Bangladesh. If current rates of urbanisation continue, the country's urban population will double by 2035. Around the Bay of Bengal, a mega city would join Dhaka to Chittagong, creating one of the world's largest conglomerations. Whether that process produces a congested toxic unlivable mess of concrete and steel, or whether it becomes a thriving, connected, wonderful city to live in, is almost entirely down to the political and policy choices we make.

This week a critical meeting in Quito, Ecuador, will look at those critical political and policy choices. The Habitat III conference to adopt a "New Urban Agenda" builds on the Habitat Agenda of Istanbul in 1996 (Habitat II).

The new agenda is intended to reinvigorate the global commitment to sustainable urbanisation. The conference is expected to result in a concise, focused, forward-looking and action-oriented outcome document on making cities and human settlements equitable, prosperous, sustainable, just, equal and safe until 2030. By the middle of the century, a majority of the world's citizens - four out of five people - could be living in towns or cities. Indeed, in the time since the Habitat Agenda was adopted, the world has become majority urban, lending extra urgency to the New Urban Agenda.

Habitat III is one of the first major global conferences to be held after the adoption of two key agreements, last year. Agenda 2030, a new development plan for the world; and a new Climate Change agreement adopted in Paris. It offers a unique opportunity to discuss the important challenge of how cities, towns and villages are planned and managed in a sustainable manner, to meet the new global agenda and climate change goals.

The New Urban Agenda, agreed upon at Habitat III in Quito, will guide the efforts around urbanisation of a wide range of actors - nation states, city and regional leaders, international development funders, UN programmes and civil society - for the next 20 years. Inevitably, this agenda will also lay the groundwork for policies and approaches that will have long lasting impact.

HABITAT I and II

Forty years later, after both Habitat I and II, there is wide consensus that towns' and cities' structure, form, and



PHOTO: STAR

functionality need to change as societies change. Especially, slums and related informal settlements that have become a spontaneous form of urbanisation, consisting of a series of survival strategies by the urban poor, most borne out of poverty and exclusion.

Habitat III represents an opportunity to make concrete the ideals of Habitat II in designing policies, planning urban spaces for all, and providing affordable urban services and utilities through adopting a 'New Urban Agenda' this October.

Towards the New Urban Agenda

The core issues of the Habitat II Agenda - adequate housing and sustainable human settlements - remain on the table, as the number of people worldwide living in urban slums continues to grow. There is also an increasing recognition that cities have morphed into mega-regions, urban corridors and city-regions whose economic, social and political geographies defy traditional conceptions of the "city".

Impact of the agenda

The Agenda will seek to create a mutually reinforcing relationship between urbanisation and development. Several core ideas form the ideological underpinnings of the New Urban Agenda. Democratic development and respect for human rights feature prominently in the draft agreements, as

does the relationship between the environment and urbanisation.

The new agenda also places importance on establishing a global monitoring mechanism to track progress on meeting commitments. As an "agenda", it will provide guidance to nation states, city and regional authorities, civil society, foundations, NGOs, academic researchers and UN agencies. However, this guidance is not binding. This arrangement is different from, for example, the December 2015 climate negotiations in Paris, which resulted in a legally binding agreement.

Let's take a practical example. The new urban agenda calls for mass transit systems and to cut back our dependence on vehicles. In recent years in Dhaka, our response to traffic congestion has been to build flyovers. This has been compared to an overweight person addressing the need to lose weight by loosening their belt. You feel better at first, but it doesn't last. The underlying issues are not addressed. The government recently broke ground on metro rail link between Uttara and the airport. With policy choices like this, we can move Dhaka to the fore of the New Urban Agenda.

The New Urban Agenda and Bangladesh

A broad range of actors in Bangladesh were involved in contributing to developing the New Urban Agenda. The

Government of Bangladesh, through the Ministry of Housing and Public Works, is engaged in both the Habitat III conference and related academic discussions through various national and international forums.

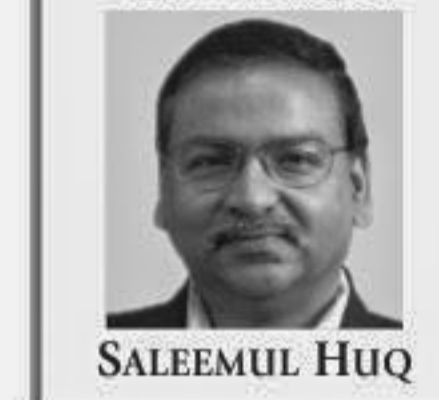
It is estimated that 60 percent of Bangladesh's GDP is produced in urban areas. Having laid out an urban vision in the 7th Five-year Plan as "compact, networked, resilient, competitive, and inclusive and smart," Bangladesh still has considerable work ahead to meet international goals set by the New Urban Agenda. Certainly, in Bangladesh the stakes are high, since it is the third most urbanised nation in South Asia.

The 'new urban agenda' will clearly influence policymakers as they consider cities, urbanisation and sustainable development, and set priorities at the national levels. With the global perspectives on managing urbanisation for making cities and human settlements equitable, prosperous, sustainable, just, equal and safe, Bangladesh can finalise the long awaited national urban sector policy. And it can begin drafting a 'New Urban Agenda' to tackle the country's rapid urbanisation in order to maximise the benefits of urbanisation for the people of Bangladesh.

The writers are Acting Country Director of UNDP Bangladesh and Urban Programme Specialist of UNDP Bangladesh.

Taking adaptation to the next level

POLITICS OF CLIMATE CHANGE



SALEEMUL HUQ

I am writing this from Colombo, Sri Lanka where I have been attending the Fifth Asia Pacific Adaptation forum here with over 800 participants from over fifty countries in Asia and the Pacific, including senior officials from governments, academics and researchers, civil society, media and UN agencies and development funders, private sector, and students and children came together over three days to share knowledge and experiences of planning and implementing adaptation activities in their respective countries and sectors.

This regional forum is organised by the Asia Pacific Adaptation Network (APAN) every two years with previous ones held in Malaysia, South Korea and Thailand. So it has now almost been a decade of moving up the knowledge ladder on adaptation.

I will share some of the key outcomes of this year's event from my perspective. **Moving from planning to implementation**

In almost every country in the region, adaptation plans have already been developed at national levels and in some cases also at local levels. This means that the emphasis has shifted from planning to implementation. This shift necessitates greater resource allocation in both financial as well as human resource terms. Also, the planning process itself requires to be revised based on learning-by-doing.

This is particularly relevant for Bangladesh where the Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) is now already many years old and is currently being revisited.

Moving from short to longer time frames

A very important lesson for the planners and investors is that short term (say three or five years only) project based investments which are meant to produce short term results is no longer appropriate. From now on, all investments must be based on getting a long term outcome and impact (and not just short term output).

This means that the most important objective by which any new adaptation investment from now on must be judged is its longer term sustainability beyond the project period. It no longer matters so much what the project does during the project period but rather what the project will leave behind when it is over. **Moving from donor dependent funding to national funding**

There is no doubt that the developed countries who are most responsible for the emissions of greenhouse gases are responsible for providing financial help to the poorer vulnerable countries and

adaptation projects but rather mainstreaming adaptation into national, sectoral and local adaptation and their regular budgets.

Moving from short term to longer term capacity building systems

The final message from the Fifth Asia Pacific Adaptation Forum is the need to shift the focus from the current short-term oriented paradigm of funding and delivering capacity to tackle climate change, which is largely (if not entirely) delivered through international consultants and consulting companies from developed countries who fly in and

longer-term capacity building systems will be to invest in capacitating universities through both South-South as well as North-South knowledge networks.

Implications for Bangladesh
Bangladesh will be developing its National Adaptation Plan (NAP) as well as its Nationally Developed Contribution (NDC) over the coming months. It has the advantage of having started the planning and investment process on adaptation as well as mitigation some years ago and so, can move to the next level which needs to

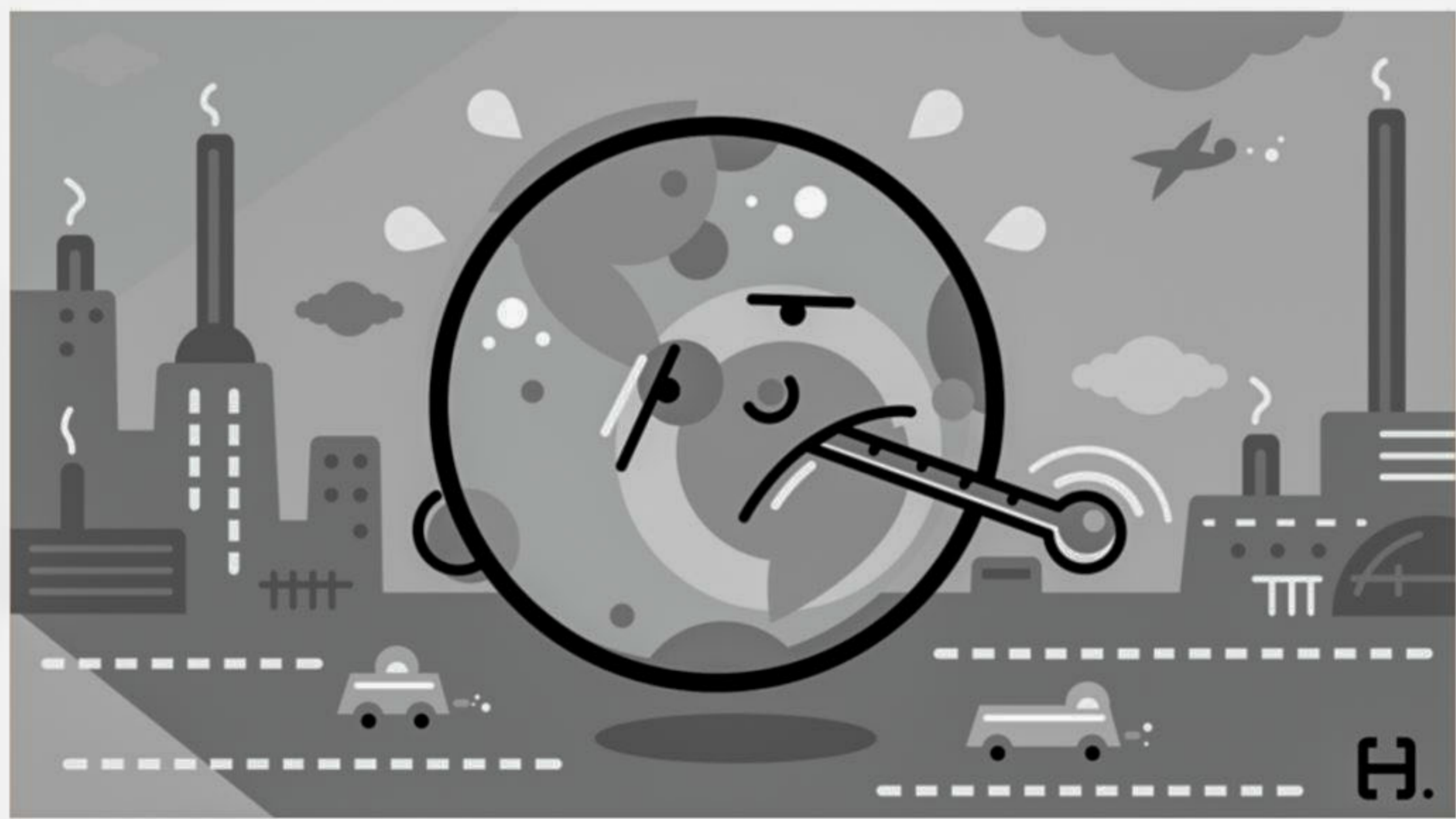


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communities to help them adapt to climate change. However, although these countries accept their responsibilities and have indeed promised to provide funding, this has been slow to materialise in reality. Even if all the amounts promised were to be delivered in time that would still not be enough to tackle the scale of the problem.

Hence, the developing countries need to think about how to use their own finance to promote adaptation. This does not necessarily mean setting aside new and separate funds for standalone

deliver short workshops and then fly out again. This model leaves very little long-term capacity behind.

We need to think of investing in a new longer-term capacity building "system" which will be sustainable beyond the project period. In order to deliver this effectively, it is necessary to identify and invest in institutions of each country.

One set of long term sustainable institutions which are meant to build capacity of the next generation of leaders of every country are universities. Hence, a logical investment in developing

focus on mainstreaming climate change into national, sectoral and local actions, rather than wasting energy and resources in producing another set of reports that will end up sitting on shelves without affecting reality on the ground.

Bangladesh is well placed to lead the transition from incremental adaptation to truly transformative adaptation that is well integrated into national development plans and budgets.

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