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SDGs and climate resilient development



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Bangladesh has made significant development gains since independence and made greater progress more rapidly in the last decade. Per capita income has increased manifold while the poverty rate has been reduced significantly, from nearly 60 percent in 1990 to 31.5 percent in 2010 and approximately 24.8 in 2015. Further, Bangladesh has demonstrated high degree of achievement in vast majority of the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). Bangladesh has been duly recognised globally for these achievements.

Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and climate change

For Bangladesh, the next fifteen years (2015-2030 periods) of development will be dominated by the serious commitment to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs). The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has taken this seriously and has set up an innovative mechanism of allocating different SDG targets to different ministries and agencies, and distributed roles, as principal, associates and supporting, to complete the tasks.

The seventeen SDGs are all consistent with Bangladesh's sustainable development. The first eight SDGs are central to all the vision and planning exercises of Bangladesh, particularly the Seventh Five Year Plan (FYP7). These SDGs are: No Poverty (SDG 1); Zero Hunger (SDG 2); Good Health and Wellbeing (SDG 3); Quality Education (SDG 4); Gender Equality (SDG 5); Clean Water and Sanitation (SDG 6); Affordable and Clean Energy (SDG 7); Decent Work and Economic Growth (SDG 8). SDG 13 has been for Climate Actions. The others are equally important, and achieving the first eight will enable people to harness the others more easily. But, one of the greatest threats to attain the above goals is the scourge the country faces from the increasing impacts of climate change, particularly mediated by climate induced disasters.

A set of twelve well-identified complex and reinforcing impacts of climate change on Bangladesh are as follows:

1. Sea level rise
2. Cyclone (intensity and frequency)
3. Deeper penetration of saline water
4. Erratic rainfall
5. Flood (intensity and frequency)

6. Drought
7. River bank erosion
8. Health
9. Food security
10. Water security
11. Land slide in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)
12. Migration

Global challenges and great convergence

In the last decade, the science of climate change has become more robust. Policy prominence of climate change has increased rapidly, and entering the global and national policy discourse, are included in the early stages of national planning.

In the last decades, the global economy was coming out of a recession, mainly in the advanced economies. Middle East was engaged in wars in Iraq, Libya and Syria resulting in huge human toll, misery and displacement. Europe was experiencing mass migration and also rises of ultra-right views. Brexit added to the political complexity. All these were further complicated by the rise of unconventional approaches to governance and challenges to the two party political paradigms in the politics of USA.

Despite all these negative developments, there has been a major positive development globally. The year 2015 experienced a unique convergence of three important global processes following from the Earth Summit of 1992. These include: (1) The UN summit on SDGs at the 70th UN General Assembly resulting in universal agreement on 17 SDGs; (2) the UN high-level meeting on the Sendai Framework for integration of Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) in sustainable development; and (3) the universal agreement on Paris Climate Conference known as COP 21 under the UNFCCC which its complement, SDG 13 on Climate Action.

There is a huge scope for building synergies among the three processes and outcomes to strengthen the national policies and strategies on development. This would increase resilience to climate change and reduce risks from natural disasters and climate change impacts. These may have long term implications on international, regional and national policies of economic growth, social development and environmental conservation. For Bangladesh, the convergence of these

three processes offers an ideal opportunity of meeting the development, environment, social and climate change challenges simultaneously.

Climate change, disaster and development linkages

Despite the convergence in global thinking and achievements in adopting the Paris Agreement on climate change (CC), Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) and sustainable development (SD) agenda 2030, it is strongly felt that if urgent actions are not taken to address climate change, it will undermine most of the development gains, increase poverty and inequality in different regions of the world, particularly in Asia and Africa. Climate risk reduction is becoming central to the planning processes of Bangladesh.

This was reflected in the report of the

Vulnerability and exposure to climate variability and extremes are closely linked to existing inequity and poverty. Restricted and differentiated access to physical, financial and social capitals, and unequal opportunity of access to government supports and services enhance vulnerability.

World Economic and Social Survey, 2016 of the United Nations. The report says, 95 percent of the poor people living in the coastal areas of Bangladesh are experiencing the severe negative impacts of climate change that affect their agriculture, food security, water, sanitation, health, employment, income, houses, communication, infrastructure, habitat and livelihood. One of the top three reasons for failure in poverty alleviation globally is climate change. The report reiterates that the conditions of low-income people, who already face inequity, will worsen with impacts of climate change.

A total of 6,457 extreme weather related disasters occurred during 1995-2015, which claimed more than 600,000 lives across the world, mainly in the developing countries, and affected another 4.2 billion people. The climate variability and extremes affect women, children and elderly people disproportionately. Bangladesh is facing many of the negative impacts of climate change due to its location (in between the great Himalayas in the North and turbulent Bay of Bengal in the South) and geophysical conditions. The country and the people are facing high level of social vulnerability which is associated with high population, decreasing land, wide spread poverty, some weak policy, meeting the needs of institutional integration and lack of investment in science, and technological innovation.

The country has to incur significant economic, social and development costs due to climate change impacts and natural disasters. The global average annual cost of climate disasters has increased because of climate change induced frequent and devastating floods, storms, droughts and heat waves. The economic loss and damage due to climate change has increased substantially recently due to inadequate adaptation actions, particularly in the developing world, where the climate change impacts are very high. The recent climate scenario by the UNEP suggests that tropical regions will be highly at risk of climate hazards which will not only eat-up the development gains, but will threaten the future potential of development in the South Asian region including Bangladesh. Bangladesh envisions being a middle income country by 2021 and an economically developed country by 2041. To meet these dreams we will need to address climate change impacts and adapt rapidly to the changes in climate patterns and consequent impacts on the economy, the climate vulnerable populations and ecosystems.

Growing poverty and inequity in the climate change world

It is felt that the impacts of climate change, degradation of natural resources and the ecosystem, and structural inequity are locked in a vicious cycle. Vulnerability and exposure to climate variability and extremes are closely linked to existing inequity and

poverty. Restricted and differentiated access to physical, financial and social capitals, and unequal opportunity of access to government supports and services enhance vulnerability. Uneven access to health services, education and employment (particularly of the poor, women and communities living in hard to reach areas) and perpetuation of discrimination under the existing institutional and cultural norms create social conditions for greater vulnerability. These are being again aggravated by climate change, natural disasters and other externality like market shocks in Bangladesh.

Further, the areas and habitats of the poor and marginal communities are exposed to climate hazards and they are highly sensitive to the impacts and shocks. Thus the economic activities and livelihood of the poor living in both rural and urban settings (mainly in the slums and fringe areas) are severely affected by climate change and natural disasters. To address this, the government has increased their attention towards the poor and marginal groups through social safety nets in Bangladesh. These are again influenced by power-elite politics and poor governance resulting in sub-optimal outcomes.

Multiple shocks and displacement

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) Fifth Assessment Report (AR5, 2014) assessed the climate change impacts on ecosystems and livelihood of the people and showed how poverty, livelihood and inequity interact with climate change. The livelihood assets and options of the poor are directly affected by climate change induced impacts, such as floods, cyclones, salinity, water logging and droughts in Bangladesh. These are evident in coastal zone, floodplain, upland and in the hilly regions.

The groups whose livelihood depend on climate sensitive natural resources like agriculture, fisheries, poultry, and forestry are severely exposed to climate change impacts. There are many efforts of government, local government agencies, NGOs and development partners for diversification and intensification of livelihoods of the poor and marginal communities, which are being affected by climate variability and natural disasters.