

Climate change: What Bangladesh can do

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Growing up in the northeast region of the US, I can say that the average person's carbon footprint is one of the highest in the world due to the privilege that comes with living there. From going on planes frequently to creating e-waste by disposing of old phones and TVs, the luxuries are endless. But across the country, in cities by the Pacific Ocean, people have different attitudes. There, you can't go to a grocery store having forgotten your reusable shopping bag without your fellow shoppers frantically trying to find you one. Where does this rare awareness and urgency come from?

Every day when these shoppers leave their homes, they're reminded of reality. Waste dots their ocean, bobbing in the waves. They see the effects of reckless actions firsthand and therefore have a greater drive to make a difference.

As a US-residing Bangladeshi, I expected the same aspect of human nature to stay true in Dhaka. When I arrived a few weeks ago, I was surprised that I wasn't immediately overwhelmed by a craze over global warming. According to the Scientific American, melting snow in the Himalayas is causing frequent flooding. Water edges further and further



PHOTO: STAR

into our land everyday on coastal areas, wiping away farms, houses, etc. The World Health Organization claims that all the water is causing water-borne diseases like cholera to be even more common, and in a country that is burdened by overpopulation, this is even more dangerous. The Daily Star reported that The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change deemed "that groundwater, crop soils and many

rivers are likely to become increasingly saline as a result of climate change effects."

However, Bangladeshis have adapted, as usual. This country has repeatedly stunned the rest of the world by improving despite incessant obstacles. The way people have dealt with climate change is no different. According to The World Bank, farmers have thought of ways to

make their ground fertile again after saline contamination. Flood shelters that accommodate cattle have been built to incentivise locals to utilise them in Cox's Bazar.

But when I asked my great-grandmother's cook Asiya if she knew anything about what was causing the need to adapt, she met me with a blank stare. Following a study done by The Guardian, neither Asiya nor the farmers brainstorming constructive ways to fend off the effects of climate change emit even one-seventieth of the carbon the average American emits. The injustice is in the fact that they didn't cause the problem, yet they're having to deal with it and they haven't even been made aware of why problems are arising.

National Geographic projects that by 2050, Bangladesh will be partially underwater. So how can we create a people who are taught the reason behind the flooding? A people that will propel a California-effect by showing the perpetrators of climate change the humanity in those who are suffering from it? We can read, write, speak and protest. We can join forces with those around us and push for education, push for the agenda, because we live in a country that will always strive to do more than save itself.

The fight for clean energy starts now

KAZI AKIB BIN ASAD

Clean energy has been in the headlines for the good part of the last quarter of a century, when people around the world realised our planet cannot sustain on just fossil fuels. In Bangladesh, considered a lower-middle income country by The World Bank, the status quo was far different.

When speaking about clean energy, known more popularly as "renewable energy", the general consensus is a unanimous "YES" for everyone cares about the Earth and its environment. However, realising its benefits, implementing its proper use, and adapting to the new lifestyle is nothing short of a revolution.

The fossil fuels – coal, oil, and natural gas – are depleting at a faster rate than expected, in Bangladesh and the world. We have been dependent on fossil fuels since the day we knew we had them, but it's high time that we look for alternatives catering to our energy demand, and leaving the least amount of carbon footprint in the environment possible.

Our dependency on fossil fuels coupled with the constant increase in heavy human activities, also has its effects on climate change, whether we choose to acknowledge it or not. It is not difficult to observe how these fuels run our industries, drive our vehicles to and from work and cook our food on a day-to-day basis; what goes beyond our notice is how the same actions lead to increased levels of carbon dioxide, sulphur dioxide, and other toxic compounds in the environ-



ment. Department of Environment and World Health Organisation (WHO) reports show that there is a rise in patients suffering and dying from respiratory diseases due to vehicular and industrial emissions, putting our capital city among the ones with worst air quality. Particulate matters in the humid Dhaka air cause smog visible around the city skyline. These consequences of using fossil fuels will have to be faced by the next generation, if we do not look for sustainable solutions right now.

Amidst lack of proper knowledge and political instability, the revolution for clean energy in Bangladesh began with Grameen Shakti in 1996, with the introduction of solar panels to the rural communities. Where grid electricity was a luxury, the locals gracefully accepted and in due time benefitted from the technology that produced solar energy for their

homes and farms. What started out as privatised "solar home systems" using photovoltaic panels has been so successful that new investments in this sector are regularly pouring in, generating both energy and employment.

A developing country with a major agricultural sector, Bangladesh has almost 50000 biogas plants installed. Biogas has also had a major impact in the energy scene with its easy access and utility, and is much favoured in rural areas. Furthermore, recent innovations in solid waste technology promise advancements in biogas and biomass technology. On a personal level, I have been doing research on waste-to-energy practices in Dhaka, and have found that proper use of the municipal waste can extensively reduce our energy demands.

Looking towards the future, the government has begun investigating into oppor-

tunities to develop wind and wave energy potentials. Establishment of a new 60 MW wind farm in Cox's Bazar, with the support of Danish investment, is scheduled to begin this year; the concept of clean energy technology is definitely something that is being spread across the country.

The fight for a greener environment starts with the adaptation of cleaner energy. With steady progress, we can hope that by the year 2050, Bangladesh will move forward into attaining the status of a middle-income country – not by depleting fossil fuels, but with a sustainable infrastructure that advocates better environment for its future generations.

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