

Pursuing climate action in the Bangladesh apparel industry

Public-private partnerships could help us take the crucial steps forward



MOSTAFIZ UDDIN

RMG NOTES

ANY of us will have heard the story of the boiled frog. Legend has it that if you put a frog in a pot of boiling water, it will instantly leap out. But if you put it in a pot filled with pleasantly tepid water and gradually heat it, the frog will remain in the water until it boils to death.

A parallel to this can be drawn with the global challenge we now face around climate change. We seem to be sleepwalking into a disaster of our own making. Each year that passes, we hear the same speeches, the same discussions. Yet we continue to make the same mistakes, setting targets which lack ambition and urgency and taking the easiest possible road.

As citizens and businesses of the world, we have extracted the earth's natural resources at an alarming rate. According to some estimates, we now consume natural resources at a rate that is 1.7 times higher than they are being regenerated. This is thanks to population growth and the disposable society in which we live.

During the recent virtual Climate Change Ambition Summit, Antonio Guterres, Secretary-General of the United Nations, expressed his fear that the global temperature may rise by up to three degrees Celsius if countries belonging to the G-20 are unable to drastically reduce their emissions. We already know that a global temperature increase of just one degree Celsius would lead to an overwhelming environmental hazard. What would happen if temperatures rose by three degrees Celsius? Especially in countries such as Bangladesh, which have been identified as susceptible to climate impacts?

Many countries belonging to

the Global North have already strengthened their climate response agenda to address climate change. The United Kingdom, Canada and Japan have pledged to achieve carbon neutrality and net-zero emissions by the end of 2050. Joe Biden, the present US President, has signed an executive order to have the United States rejoin the Paris Agreement. In Asia, India and China have vowed to cut down a significant portion of carbon emissions by 2030. China envisages bringing down its carbon emissions by at least 65 percent by the end of 2030. India too is on track to reduce carbon emission to 37-39 percent below its 2005 levels.

The United Nations Climate Action Plan outlines a massive transformation of operations to attain a 45 percent reduction in carbon emission and an 80 percent sourcing of electricity from renewable energy by 2030. In this regard, Bangladesh has developed a Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) document following the UNFCCC guidelines under the Paris Agreement.

However, the NDC only articulates a mandate of achieving at least 10 percent of total power generation from renewable energy sources by 2030. The recent 2021 database of electricity generation mix reveals that only 3.22 percent of it is derived from renewable sources. What these figures show is that there is a sharp disconnect between our national mandate and the global mandate.

We need to address this, as a country and garment industry. We cannot afford to overlook the various global climate pledges, because our biggest RMG export markets lie in Europe (60 percent), USA (18 percent) and Canada (four percent).

In order to keep pace with global buyers, it is essential that the climate targets in Bangladesh are aligned with the most ambitious targets globally. We must lead, not follow, on this issue and be proactive, not react when things are

too late.

There are other factors at play. Our government has prioritised Bangladesh's LDC graduation by 2024 in the Eighth Five Year Plan (FYP). The Plan has a heavy focus on climate change and environmental sustainability. Look closely at the plan and it is clear that its success—our ability to meet national climate goals—largely depends on the private sector.

The other factor, which is rarely discussed, is that even if all RMG factories in Bangladesh installed solar rooftops, they would merely be capable of substituting around 10 percent of non-renewable energy. In other words, our industry is not only not doing enough at present but it still won't be doing enough if it makes investments in solar energy.

In other words: we need to do more,

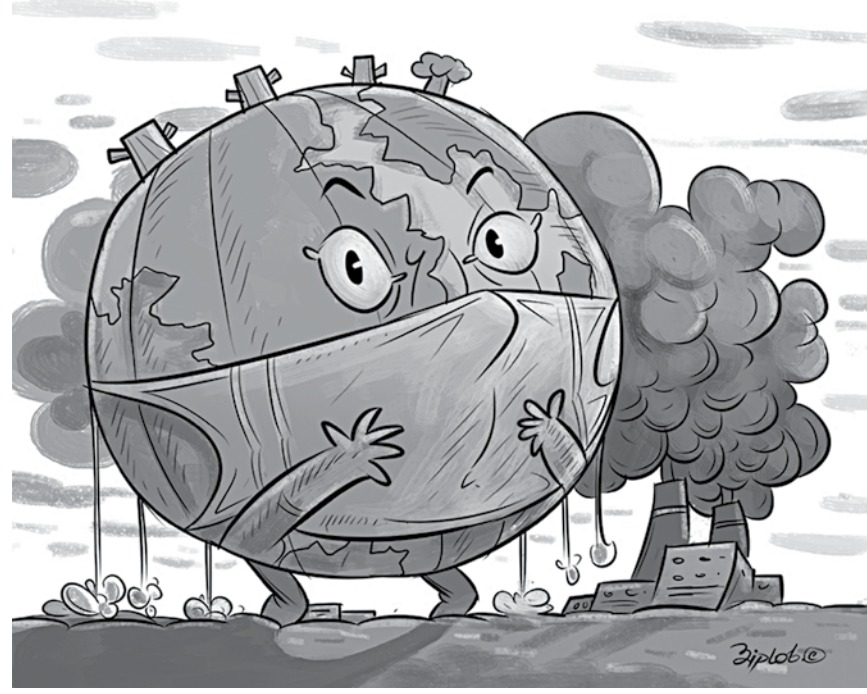


ILLUSTRATION: BIPOLO CHAKROBORTY

That means investment in new, green technology from our RMG industry. Is the money there for the investment? Can factories get access to the necessary investment collateral?

There are pockets of finance available but this is a hit and miss field. Factories face struggles to accessing finance, whether due to a lack of collateral or, in some cases, because the application process for green finance is complex and cumbersome.

and we need to be far more ambitious in our targets. We need radical change. If not, we face playing a part in our own climate catastrophe (as well as losing many of our major customers who are now looking to slash emissions in supply chains).

So what is the solution? The government of Bangladesh is addressing climate issues via two funds, one being the Climate Change Trust Fund and the other being the Bangladesh Climate

Change Resilience Fund. To this end, an obvious way forward is a far-reaching collaboration between the public and private sector, namely a public-private partnership (PPP).

A PPP of this nature could facilitate the sharing of capital expenditure (CAPEX) investment in renewable energy production, where say 40-50 percent would be financed by the private sector and the rest covered by the public sector.

An interconnected issue is land—our lack, thereof, for solar installations. A possible solution here may be a land lease agreement between the two sectors, where the public sector provides land to the private sector for the lifetime of a solar installation period of 25 to 30 years.

Another necessary policy instrument to facilitate this may be industrial clusters completely powered by renewable energy sources. Suitable locations could be existing industrial clusters like Ashulia, Gazipur, Tangail, Mymensingh, Narayanganj and Chattogram, where there are already established or potential business. These clusters are also hubs of urbanisation, which means the excess power generated from the solar photovoltaic systems may act as an excellent source for meeting the surrounding community's energy demands.

All of this is, of course, pie in the sky unless we have an ambitious, far-reaching and world leading national zero emission plan. Net zero has to be the goal and this must be time-bound, in keeping with the targets set by leading nations and Bangladesh's customers.

The time for talking is over where climate is concerned. If we don't wake up to these issues now, we will be the perpetrators of our own downfall.

The tools to address climate issues are there. Public and private sector must work together and use them.

Mostafiz Uddin is the Managing Director of Denim Expert Limited. He is also the Founder and CEO of Bangladesh Apparel Exchange (BAE).

We need better solutions for maternal health

BJORN LOMBORG

IN the next two minutes, one woman will die from complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. She will die from entirely preventable causes during one of the most beautiful moments of human life, giving birth. The good news is that there are some solutions that are inexpensive and effective.

In a world besieged by problems from Covid-19 to climate change, it's hard to pay attention to the many other challenges that still remain. For the vast majority of the world's population, these are simple problems of survival: not dying from tuberculosis, getting enough food, breaking free of poverty and getting adequate education.

Vying for scarce resources, these problems often lose out because they don't have enough media attention, famous spokespeople or viral imagery. The harsh truth is we can't afford to fix all problems. That is why we have to ask hard questions: how big is the problem, what is the solution—and crucially, how much will it cost compared to its effects?

The tragedy of pregnant women and their children dying has been on the global health community's radar for a long time. Twenty years ago, the UN promised to address the issue. But progress to date has not been enough. Yes, maternal deaths declined by about a third from 451,000 per year in 2000 to about 295,000 today, but we had committed to more than a two-thirds



PHOTO: COLLECTED

reduction by 2015. Since then, we've promised to reduce it even further to around 100,000 deaths by 2030.

But commitment without action doesn't save pregnant women and their children. It takes financing and simple procedures.

Mothers in the hardest-hit developing countries are still 80 times more likely to die than their rich-country counterparts. And their newborns also die—last year, 2.4 million children died in their first 28 days on earth. They die because many women either give birth in their own homes, without access to skilled birth attendants, or in facilities with limited basic emergency care. The mothers die

from infections that abound with low hygiene, and high blood pressure, that can lead to seizures. Severe bleeding that can happen after childbirth kills 46,000 mothers every year.

Clearly, something needs to be done. Development professionals have put forward many proposals on how to address this global crisis, but trying to fix everything everywhere comes at a cost of over USD 30 billion per year, and it is unlikely that such funds can be mobilised.

Instead, my think tank Copenhagen Consensus, supported by funding from Merck for Mothers, worked with leading maternal health experts to use cost-benefit analysis to find the most

cost-effective policies first.

The research focused on the highest-burden 59 countries that account for 91 percent of all maternal deaths globally. Using the recognised LiST (Lives Saved Tool) model from Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, the researchers analysed more than 30 different ways to help and found that while all would have an impact, some would help much more per dollar spent.

Two interventions stood out as the very best investments for additional resources. These are straight-forward, without requiring cutting edge technology, but perhaps that is exactly why they are not well-known, lacking for celebrity endorsement and media coverage.

To drive the greatest impact for investments, the world should consider focusing on what is known as Basic Emergency Obstetric and Newborn Care (BEmONC), along with family planning. An estimated 217 million women who want to avoid pregnancy still don't have access to safe and effective family planning methods. Scaling up access to 90 percent in the 59 countries would mean that fewer women would become pregnant, avoiding 87,000 mothers dying every year.

Getting more mothers into more facilities while also improving the quality of those facilities could help them and their children survive at a greater rate. In practice, this means ensuring that adequately trained staff

are present with the right equipment and medicines to deliver simple and well-known life-saving procedures. These include immediate drying and thermal protection of the newborn, controlled cord traction, skin-to-skin contact of newborns, and assisted vaginal delivery along with neonatal resuscitation.

All of this will entail costs. Midwives and nurses have to be educated, recruited and salaried; management expanded; drugs procured; and infrastructure paid for. Moreover, women also have to be incentivised to give birth in facilities. But overall, BEmONC and family planning would cost just USD 2.9 billion per year—less than a tenth of the USD 30+ billion typically asked for, which would save only a fraction more lives.

It would save the women we have already promised to save at a very low cost: in total it would save 162,000 mothers every year along with 1.2 million newborns. If we measure the total value of these efforts, each dollar spent would achieve USD 71 of social benefits per dollar spent, making it one of the best investments in the world.

While you read this, at least one more mother died. We owe it to her and all the millions, whose lives we can save, to invest USD 2.9 billion smartly to bring hundreds of billions of dollars of economic and health benefits to people around the world.

Bjorn Lomborg is President of the Copenhagen Consensus and Visiting Fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

QUOTABLE Quote

LANGSTON HUGHES
(1902-1967)
American poet.

*Hold fast to dreams,
for if dreams die,
life is a broken-winged bird that
cannot fly.*

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

- 1 Game outing
- 7 Whole lot
- 11 Old suppliers
- 12 Valentine word
- 13 Lease signer
- 14 Was in debt
- 15 Fall guy
- 17 Upper limits
- 20 Hindu force
- 23 In the past
- 24 Quick looks
- 26 Small number of
- 27 "The Rise of Skywalker" heroine
- 28 Spots on TV
- 29 Rivals
- 31 Take in
- 32 Satchel part
- 33 Tidy
- 34 Small restaurant amount
- 37 Washday
- 39 Attack
- 43 Different
- 44 Pay back
- 45 Prom attendee
- 46 Joined together

DOWN

- 1 Plop down
- 2 Untouched serve
- 3 Marsh
- 4 Accumulate
- 5 Monthly bill
- 6 Wild about
- 7 Catch-phrase
- 8 Like most of these letters
- 9 Planning time
- 10 Tie the knot
- 16 Approves
- 17 Alfresco eateries
- 18 Deal maker
- 19 Politician's loyal supporters
- 21 Sorceress of myth
- 22 Useful skill
- 24 Clutches
- 25 Director Spike
- 30 Horse with no wins
- 33 Writer's work
- 35 Turn to slush
- 36 Dance party
- 37 Charter
- 38 Bullring cheer
- 40 Conclusion
- 41 Wisdom bringer
- 42 TV's Danson

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YESTERDAY'S ANSWERS

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BEETLE BAILEY BY MORT WALKER

SOMETIMES I FEEL LIKE THE REST OF THE WORLD DOESN'T EVEN KNOW WE EXIST

WHY DO YOU SAY THAT?

I CAN'T FIND CAMP SWAMPY ON GOOGLE MAPS

THANK YOU VETERANS

BABY BLUES BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT

DAD, ARE YOU REALLY GOING TO BE IN A BAND?

THAT'S THE PLAN, SWEETIE.

THE FIRST STEP IS TO DUST OFF THE OLD SIX-STRING.

WHEN I DECORATED IT FOR YOU A WHILE BACK.

SO YOU DID...