

ASPIRATIONS FOR THE NEXT 50 YEARS

DHAKA FRIDAY FEBRUARY 19, 2021, FALGUN 6, 1427 BS

Bangladesh in 2050: Vision of a climate resilient society

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has the opportunity to represent vulnerable countries at global forums like COP26, to lead the South-South sharing of knowledge and experience and in adaptation among the vulnerable countries. In the era of Covid-19, this provides Bangladesh the space to show both national and global leadership how to tackle the climate change emergency. Bangladesh has a solid record of decentralised, successful community-based disaster management, which is acclaimed the world over. The recently-established South Asian Regional Adaptation Centre in Dhaka can be a hub of excellence, as an effective platform in this regard. The

The centre will have a focus on locally led adaptation which has proven its efficacy in many developing countries. We have the vision of Switzerland, a

implementation and monitoring of the adaptation support to make them more effective. For example, for handling the increasing number of climate migrants particularly from coastal areas, we can prepare a bottom-up plan for their relocation, to settle them, not in Dhaka, but in nearby towns and growth centres which can be made migrant-friendly, with basic services and facilities at affordable cost. The on-going preparation of the National Adaptation Plan led by the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change can realise the paradigm of a genuinely decentralised development planning and implementation in Bangladesh. Therefore, the most fundamental way for change is to consider the Bangladesh NAP as an investment, rather than a short time-bound project, initiated and implemented by central authorities.

Next comes the pillar of governance. A process of transparent and accountable governance is another key to our 2050 vision of a resilient Bangladesh. Here the primary focus should be on allocation of investments for addressing climate change, particularly for adaptation actions and its transparent governance. The government already has initiated a budget line dedicated to climate investment and this year's budget has allocated an amount of almost USD 3 billion, which equals to almost 8 percent of our annual budget. This compares with a measly amount of average USD 300 million a year that our country gets as international support to address climate change. So the challenge is—how to make the best use of these investments. Also mobilising international support from the Green Climate Fund and other sources, particularly the grant part of climate finance is important for Bangladesh, as our graduation soon out of the LDC status will entail a decline in grant part of foreign aid that we get each year.



Floodwaters in Bogura, Bangladesh, near the Brahmaputra River.

PHOTO: MOHAMMAD PONIR HOSSAIN/REUTERS

We must remember based on evidence that international public support for adaptation flows not to the most vulnerable, but to countries with best fiduciary management systems. Similar is the case with foreign direct investment, a vital element for rapid economic growth in any developing country, which flows to regions with transparent business environment.

For mobilisation and allocation of climate finance, we must follow the principles, such as people's vulnerability- and livelihood-centred approach, polluter-pays principle, revenue neutral way of environmental taxation for the government as well as for the citizens and private sector, decentralisation of allocation and mobilisation of climate finance, and a programmatic approach for implementation of the plans and strategies.

Though environmental sustainability is typically a public good, public investments alone will not suffice to effectively address climate change.

So innovative and appropriate fiscal, financial and charge systems, in light of experiences in other countries have to be worked out. This could be tax/levy (national/local), loans (low vs market-based interest), subsidies, grants, revolving funds, equity, introduction of green bond, insurance, CSR funds, etc. The Climate Fiscal Framework of Bangladesh outlines some possibilities for climate finance for Bangladesh. This needs to be operationalised in earnest.

Finally, the most important pillar of realising our vision 2050 is capacity building at all levels. In fact, a whole of society approach is needed—from awareness to education and skill development of all types, to research and development, with delineation of specific needs of skills, expertise and policy research for tackling climate change. Also achieving climate resilience will dictate that all kinds of professionals, lower and higher, must undergo basic training on how to tackle climate change, from perspective of each profession and trade.

Unfortunately, Bangladesh is not doing well in this regard. In terms of the Human Development Index, our country ranks lower than 150 countries. The productivity in the garment sector, our number one export earner and women's employer, is the lowest among the main exporting countries. We also are in a poor position, as is demonstrated by the publication of last year's Global Knowledge Index, where Bangladesh ranked 112th out of 138 countries—we were the lowest ranked in South Asia, with India ranking the highest in our region. This does not augur well for our vision of a developed country in the next three decades.

While Bangladesh is regarded poor in terms of natural resources, we can be rich through harnessing huge demographic dividend, potentially waiting to be exploited. The 2041 plan specifies, among others, some strategies for this, such as: i) Institution of a knowledge-based economy; ii) Population with 100 percent literacy rate; iii) Universal free education for up to 12 years; iv) job-oriented skill development in vocational and training institutions, etc. This will require much higher investment than is currently available, which is perhaps the lowest in South Asia in terms of the share of our budget.

We believe our single greatest national asset are our young girls and boys, and if we are able to invest in educating them better, we can indeed transition to a significant knowledge-based economy within the next decade. However, this will require a national consensus for us to make the necessary paradigm shift.

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country truly locally-led.

As adaptation is inherently locale and region-specific, the challenge is to change the current top-down paradigm of targeting vulnerable communities by governments as well as global funds and agencies, to a bottom-up approach. This will warrant an inclusion of the local communities in the design,

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