

As climate change worsens, riparian management holds the key to our survival



FREQUENT cyclones, flooding, riverbank erosion, salinity intrusion, and increased waterlogging are among the typical climate-induced adversities affecting Bangladesh. Addressing these issues requires establishing

a link among adapting to climate changes, improving community livelihood, and sustaining biodiversity and ecosystems. However, relevant adaptation plans and projects often concentrate on one or two social or ecological issues, instead of looking at the overall situation. Such an approach is insufficient to deal with climate-induced socioecological problems. One way to effectively address multiple socioecological issues—all at the same time—is to advance riparian management. It will also help to make the country green—a call made by Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina at the inauguration ceremony of the National Tree Plantation Campaign 2021. Hence our national adaptation and biodiversity conservation plans need to have a focus on riparian management.

To understand riparian management, let me clarify that the areas around the vast networks of rivers, canals, and streams that crisscross Bangladesh are riparian habitats. Riparian vegetation filters sediments and pollutants. The fallen leaves and litter from riparian plants support healthy aquatic communities, including shrimp and fish. The roots of riparian vegetation hold the soil tight, protect the river and canal banks from erosion, and provide the much-needed river and canal bank stability. We have witnessed the collapse of many coastal embankments during Cyclone Yaas. What did not get much attention was the fact that most of the collapsing dams had little or no riparian vegetation, making those embankments inherently fragile. Meanwhile,

many plants and wildlife species—including mosses, amphibians, and reptiles—live primarily in the land-water interfaces. So, riparian management should help conserve biodiversity and ecosystem services essential for climate change adaptation.

Globally, riparian habitats are treated as areas of ecological significance. The relevant authorities in many environmentally sensitive countries often maintain a 30- to 100-metre-wide belt of intact vegetation around water bodies. Unfortunately, the idea of riparian management has yet to take proper hold in Bangladesh—a significant gap in our nature management or climate change adaptation planning. Although we lack hard statistics regarding the extent of the loss of our riparian ecosystem, there are plenty of reports regarding the encroachment of river and canal banks and the clearing of vegetation around water bodies. A recent report by the UNDP Bangladesh also shows a significant loss of riparian mangroves in selected southwestern coastal districts. All these reports imply that our riparian ecosystems and biodiversity are in grave danger.

That being said, the government's current



Proper riparian management and restoration of riparian vegetation will not only help prevent river erosion, but will aid in tackling climate change as well. PHOTO: UNDP

The effectiveness of riparian management towards tackling complex socioecological issues, including climate change adaptation, has been proven scientifically and are preferred by local communities worldwide.

initiative to restore the congested rivers and canals is praiseworthy. However, past experiences suggest that many restored rivers and canals are likely to return to their previous congested conditions within a few years. Establishing riparian plantations around the rivers and canals is likely to minimise river or canal congestion, as riparian vegetation traps sediment. Moreover, riparian vegetation can also reduce river or canal bank erosion by holding the soil tightly.

The effectiveness of riparian management towards tackling complex socioecological issues, including climate change adaptation, has been proven scientifically and are preferred by local communities worldwide. Local communities in some southwestern districts in Bangladesh are also raising riparian mangroves along the riverbanks as a second line of defence against

natural disasters and collapsing coastal embankments. We need to capitalise on these community-led initiatives to restore the degraded riparian vegetation, and create new plantations around rivers, canals, or water bodies.

Since rivers and canals are spread all over the country, effective riparian management would also spread greenness and simultaneously make the country climate-resilient. However, one should not confuse riparian management with a one-time tree planting programme around dams. We need to designate at least 30-100 metres of buffer zones around water bodies, and keep the buffer zones undisturbed and managed by local communities. Our vast experience in social forestry can be handy in designing a community-based riparian management model that can offer climate resilience and community livelihood. We

must keep in mind that the engagement of local communities and providing them with livelihood diversification opportunities are mandatory for the success of riparian management.

One underlying challenge in this regard is the lack of policy guidance. However, Section 18(A) of our constitution calls for the protection of wetlands and biodiversity. Relevant authorities need to specify policies to safeguard our riparian ecosystems and integrate them into land and water management plans. Although the Forest Department under the Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change is responsible for managing vegetation, the Ministry of Land and the Ministry of Water Resources have jurisdiction over riparian habitat as well. Inter-ministerial coordination is, thus, essential.

We should not forget that the Bay of Bengal sea level rises by 0.6-2 cm per year due to global warming. Riverbank erosion has been increasing over the past two decades as well. Areas vulnerable to cyclone and tidal surge-related hazards in Bangladesh will increase by 13.8 percent by 2050. A 30cm increase in the Bay of Bengal sea level will lead to the sinking of about 5.4 percent land area in the country. The intrusion of saline water into agricultural lands, increasing land erosion, loss of biodiversity, and displacement of people are expected to follow.

Our preparedness to adapt to those situations is the key to our survival and development. To that end, the Bangladesh government, in partnership with UNDP, is currently updating its National Adaptation Plan. I sincerely hope that our national adaptation and conservation plans focus on riparian ecosystems and utilise green ingredients to save the people, nature, and biodiversity of the country from natural disasters, and build a greener Bangladesh in the process.

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PROJECT SYNDICATE

The corporate capture of the UN food summit



WHEN I visited my parents in Bogota last month, I witnessed how people in their neighbourhood went up and down the streets begging for help to survive. Since the end of April, Colombia has experienced one of its biggest waves

of social unrest in recent times—and hunger is at the core of the protests. South Africa experienced similar turmoil in July.

Growing hunger is creating volatility in many countries, compounding the devastating social and economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the climate crisis. According to recent United Nations figures, the pandemic has increased the number of hungry people by as many as 161 million—to 811 million. Nearly one in three people—almost 2.4 billion—lack access to adequate nutrition.

Given the lack of progress towards ending global hunger and malnutrition by 2030, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will convene the Food Systems Summit in New York today. The meeting has been billed as an opportunity to discuss bold new measures that will transform the way the world produces, consumes, and thinks about food.

But the summit has been marred by controversy from the outset, largely owing to the influence of corporate interests in framing the agenda in what critics have described as an attempt to privatise decision-making. The UN set the pre-summit agenda in partnership with the World Economic Forum (WEF), placing key corporate players in leading roles. For example, the Global Alliance for Improved Nutrition (GAIN), a Swiss-based foundation, leads the

summit's work on eradicating hunger. One of GAIN's donors is the pesticide producer BASF, which seeks to portray itself as a "Food Systems Hero."

UN human rights experts have been damning in their criticism of the process, which has sidelined the UN's Committee on World Food Security (CFS). Discussions at the CFS include hundreds of representatives of smallholder farmers, fisherfolk, indigenous people, and civil society groups. Michael Fakhri, the UN special rapporteur on the right to food, has echoed the complaints of grassroots farming groups—more than 500 of

which are boycotting the summit—likening the corporations' excessive influence over the gathering to "inviting the fox right into the henhouse."

Smallholder farmers, peasants, fisherfolk, pastoralists, and indigenous people feed most of the world's population with little or no access to corporate supply chains. About 80 percent of farms are smaller than two hectares, and cover about 12 percent of the world's farmland, while the largest one percent of agribusiness farms control more than 70 percent of farmland.

Transnational corporations have a clear



World leaders must focus on ending the corporate capture of food and promoting a transition to agroecology to tackle global hunger. FILE PHOTO: REUTERS

conflict of interest when it comes to preventing land grabbing, malnutrition, tax avoidance, and pesticide overuse. The same is true of addressing demands for a move away from intensive farming and towards more socially equitable, resilient, and sustainable agroecology. Because these firms are accountable to their shareholders, profit is a more important interest than protection of the common good. But food is a common good, and access to it is a fundamental human right. That is where discussions should begin.

The increasing corporate capture of food should concern us all. If left unchecked, we will face a grim future where a handful of large firms will control what we eat and how it is produced. The increased consumption of ultra-processed edible products—a major contributor to the pandemic of obesity, type 2 diabetes, and related diseases—exemplifies the danger.

This corporate takeover reflects the belief that large agribusinesses are essential for providing food, have interests aligned with those of the public, and are better equipped than governments and civil society to set the rules and policies that shape our food systems. It allows corporations to expand their control of land, water, and fisheries, quasi-monopolise commercial seeds, and use pesticides and chemical fertilisers intensively, while failing to recognise—much less address—the attendant harms. Permitting this outlook to dominate major international forums like the UN Food Systems Summit will further undermine democracy and self-determination.

Consider pesticides. Despite the harm they cause—including the poisoning of agricultural workers and rural communities, increased pollution, and decreased soil biodiversity—their use has soared in recent decades. Manufacturers market these products aggressively and deny the extent of the damage they cause, insisting that they are safe if

used properly. The industry also claims that pesticides are necessary to meet the food needs of a growing population, especially in the context of climate change.

Brazil is a case in point. Between March 2020 and May 2021, the government extended tax exemptions on commercial pesticides and approved 613 new products—even though the country was already a world leader in pesticide use. President Jair Bolsonaro wants to increase industrial production of agricultural commodities for export, despite the lethal consequences this will have for Brazil's ecosystems and people.

Likewise, transnational corporations will not save Colombians protesting about hunger or malnutrition. These people need a government capable of taxing large firms properly in order to generate enough revenue to sustain a robust social safety net. And they need a government determined to reverse the extreme inequality in access to land that disadvantages peasants, afro-descendants, and indigenous people.

Instead of looking to global corporations to solve the growing hunger and malnutrition crisis, the UN and national governments must end the corporate capture of food and promote a transition to agroecology. They should start by ensuring that multinational firms pay their fair share of taxes, and are held accountable for the environmental and human rights consequences of their activities.

In 1948, the UN recognised that food is a human right. Sadly, the UN summit is more likely to feed corporate profits than provide hope to hundreds of millions of hungry people.

Sofia Monsalve, secretary-general of FIAN International, is a member of the International Panel of Experts on Sustainable Food Systems.

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QUOTABLE Quote



JAMES BALDWIN
(1924–1987)
American novelist

It is certain, in any case, that ignorance, allied with power, is the most ferocious enemy justice can have.

CROSSWORD BY THOMAS JOSEPH

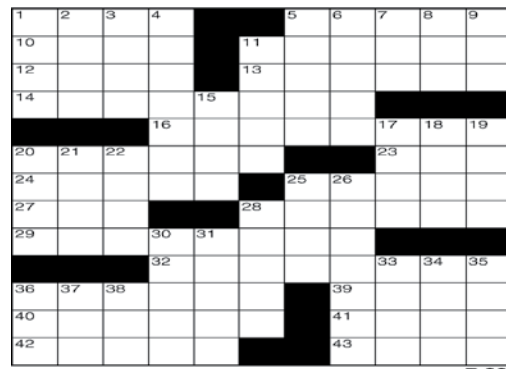
ACROSS

- 1 Farm sight
- 5 Barber-shop offering
- 10 Reclined
- 11 Hot, in a way
- 12 Fairy tale monster
- 13 Lamented loudly
- 14 Arrogant folks
- 16 Kitchen appliances
- 20 Parade site
- 23 Compete
- 24 Pens for hens
- 25 Constructed
- 27 Radius setting
- 28 Popular trees
- 29 Poultry buys

- 32 Table protectors
- 36 Big lummoX
- 39 Region
- 40 Brings to bear
- 41 Fight site
- 42 Prom crowd
- 43 Head, to Henri

DOWN

- 1 Messy person
- 2 Othello's betrayer
- 3 Old Italian coin
- 4 Easy dance
- 5 Flag features
- 6 Raise
- 7 Completely
- 8 Neckline shape
- 9 Finale
- 11 Work byproduct
- 15 Low digits
- 17 Diabolical
- 18 Irritate
- 19 Collections
- 20 Wound remnant
- 21 Matador's foe
- 22 Capital of Italia
- 25 Cell feature
- 26 Parvenu
- 28 Ham and lamb
- 30 Ridicule
- 31 Horn output
- 33 Lake near Buffalo
- 34 Monthly bill
- 35 Cook's mint
- 36 Attain
- 37 Fire
- 38 Sheltered side



TUESDAY'S ANSWERS

S E N D C A S T
C L A U S L A N C E
R O M E O O R G A N
U P A B A T T E R S
B E T T E R S L E E
S H O R T T A D
A S F O R
P A D A P O R T
A L L B I T T E R S
B U T T E R S I M A P
A R E A S I M A G E
T A R T S N A D I A
E L S A D E C K

BETLE BAILEY



BY MORT WALKER



BABY BLUES



BY KIRKMAN & SCOTT



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