

Female youth voices from Bangladesh at COP29

Highlighting the impact and advocacy of young Bangladeshi women leaders at COP29 as they fight for climate justice on the global stage.



PHOTO: REUTERS

At COP29, Saila brought stories of vulnerable Bangladeshi communities to the global stage, highlighting the urgent need for climate finance and addressing the realities faced by people displaced internally due to climate impacts.

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The voices of young women from Bangladesh resonated powerfully at the 2024 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP29), bringing stories of resilience, advocacy, and determination to the global stage. Representing diverse communities and experiences, Saila Sobnom Richi, Farzana Farak Jhumu, and Fariha Aumi embodied the spirit of youth leadership in addressing climate justice.

Saila Sobnom Richi, ICCCAD Delegate

Saila Sobnom Richi, an undergraduate student from the Institute of Disaster Management and Vulnerability Studies at Dhaka University, began her journey in climate activism with a deep connection to her community in Barishal where she was born and brought up. Her path to climate leadership started with YouthNet for



Saila

Climate Justice, where she became a Youth Climate Ambassador and Media and Movement Coordinator, advocating for gender and climate justice for over four years. Reflecting on her work, Saila shared, "I have seen how vulnerable our people are to climate change. If we don't act now, our future

is at stake."

At COP29, Saila brought stories of vulnerable Bangladeshi communities to the global stage, highlighting the urgent need for climate finance and addressing the realities faced by people displaced internally due to climate impacts.

Speaking at the "Youth Gathering" event hosted by the Government of Bangladesh, Saila posed a critical question: "Are youth voices genuinely being empowered, or are they merely tokenised?" Her words resonated with many young attendees grappling with similar doubts.

Representing Bangladesh at COP29 came with its own challenges. Saila candidly reflected on her reliance on a foreign international non-governmental organisation (INGO) badge and funding from another country's embassy to attend, questioning the authenticity of national support for youth empowerment. Despite the hurdles, Saila remained undeterred, participating in movements such as demanding climate finance at the COP29 Action Zone. She also launched her documentary, *INFLUENCERS: The Path Led by Knowledge*, at the Share Hub Pavilion, showcasing the power of youth-led initiatives.

Saila expressed her frustration at the insufficient allocation of USD three hundred billion instead of the required USD one trillion for climate finance. Yet, she maintained her optimism, emphasising the need for the youth to be included in decision-making processes and not just as symbolic representatives. Reflecting on her first COP experience, Saila said, "This is just the beginning for me. I will continue fighting for my country to have a stronger voice on the global stage."

Farzana Faruk Jhumu, UNICEF Youth Advocate
Farzana Faruk Jhumu's journey in

climate activism began in 2018 when she co-founded KaathPencil, an organisation focused on educating underprivileged children. Through her interactions with climate displaced families, Farzana realised the profound human impact of environmental disasters.

"I remember speaking to a mother who had lost her home to river erosion. Her pain became my purpose," Farzana recalled. This experience inspired her



Farzana

to go deeper into the intersection between climate change, child rights, and justice, eventually joining the global "Fridays for Future" movement – an international movement of school students who skip Friday classes to participate in demonstrations to demand action from political leaders to prevent climate change.

At COP29, Farzana was moved by several powerful moments. She spoke at an event advocating for the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to address climate change and human rights. Reflecting on the experience, she said, "It was empowering to demand accountability from states for the harm they have caused to vulnerable communities." Listening to youth stories from around the globe reinforced her belief in the collective

power of young people to challenge states on their climate obligations.

One of her most significant achievements at COP29 was giving an intervention in a negotiation room, representing women, gender constituencies, and youth non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Her demands, delivered with conviction, were reflected in the COP29 presidency text.

"That moment showed me that our voices can truly shape decisions, even in spaces dominated by power and politics," Farzana said.

Despite her successes, Farzana faced challenges as a young woman navigating a patriarchal system. She described moments of "mansplaining" and being tokenised on panels to ensure gender balance. However, these experiences only strengthened her resolve. "Being underestimated only fuels my determination to prove them wrong," she remarked.

Farzana also found inspiration in her interactions with global leaders and fellow activists. Representing the youth in a meeting with Dr Muhammad Yunus, she proposed creating an official youth mechanism to enhance their involvement in multilateral processes. Reflecting on her overall COP29 experience, Farzana said, "Sea levels are rising, but so are we. We have no choice but to fight harder for our future."

Fariha Aumi, ICCCAD Delegate

Fariha Aumi's activism was inspired by her upbringing in southern Bangladesh, where she witnessed firsthand the impacts of climate change. Her passion deepened in 2018 when Greta Thunberg's "Fridays for Future" movement ignited global awareness, prompting her to join the fight for climate justice.

"Growing up, I saw how cyclones devastated my community. It's not just

statistics for us; it's our lives," Fariha shared.

At COP29, Fariha participated in a panel discussion with the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) (ICCCAD) that brought together youth from Bangladesh, China, and Nepal. This exchange of regional perspectives was a highlight for her, as it built deeper connections among peers facing similar challenges. She also recounted a conversation with a representative from Tuvalu, a small country in the Pacific Ocean made up of nine coral islands, who described the severe water crisis in their capital. This harsh narrative struck a chord with Fariha, as she envisioned a similar future for Dhaka.

"When he described the struggles of the people dealing with the water crisis, I could see my own city in his words. It was heartbreaking," she said.

Navigating societal expectations as a young female leader presented its own



Fariha

challenges. Fariha acknowledged the resistance she faced but emphasised how persistence and gradual acceptance helped her overcome these barriers.

"At first, many didn't take me seriously. But with every step forward, I earned their respect," she reflected.

For Fariha, the most inspiring aspect of COP29 was the shared commitment to climate justice among attendees, from heads of state to young activists. This unity reaffirmed her belief in the collective strength of the Global South. However, she described the conference as a "compromising COP" due to the lack of substantial progress on critical issues.

Looking ahead, Fariha intends to share her insights with her peers, encouraging them to engage in global climate discussions. "We have to be the change we want to see. It's our responsibility to amplify our voices and demand justice," she said.

As COP29 drew to a close, these young leaders left the conference with a pressing question on their minds: will their voices spark the change needed, or will they be drowned out in the politics of inaction? The fight for climate justice is far from over.

A master procrastinator's guide on how not to procrastinate

MAHPARA FAATIN

Procrastinating may be a guilty pleasure or even a coping mechanism for many of us; one that has a tight grasp on our daily lives. Many people, including myself, simply work better under the pressure of finishing things in the eleventh hour. However, it is undeniable that the guilt of procrastination devours us from within and is detrimental to our mental well-being. If so, how exactly can we untangle ourselves from its sticky threads?

Strict time management

Habits are deeply ingrained in our brains. They compel our bodies to carry out certain actions almost automatically. That, in turn, makes it difficult for our minds to override these habits. This makes it all the more important for us to adhere to a to-do list that outlines when we ought to perform a chore and for how long. By sticking to the list and turning it into a habit, our minds might just spare us from procrastination.

It is, of course, important that you make a realistic routine that is open to changes. As someone who has to juggle work and academics with multiple extracurricular activities, I would suggest to even utilise time as best as you can. For instance, maybe read a book or listen to a lecture when you are stuck in traffic, provided you are in the right headspace for it.

Know what to prioritise

You may not be able to fully complete your to-do list, and that's absolutely fine. But make it your goal to complete at least three productive tasks every day. Get the hardest things done when you have more energy. You should also try and prioritise tasks according to their deadlines.

Identify and remove distractions

What are some things that easily distract you? Is it your social media or streaming services? Figuring out what prevents you from getting work done can help create barriers to

accessing them. If it's the allure of social media that makes you procrastinate, keep your phone stashed away in a drawer or place it in another room. Do anything you can to make it inconvenient for you to start scrolling.

Motivate yourself

Use sticky notes to remind yourself what it is that you're working so hard for. Make use of positive reinforcement. Tell yourself that if you finish just this one task, you can watch an episode of your favourite show.

What I do when I need to urgently get something done late at night is light a scented candle. This is a hack I will never stop blabbering about. Not only do the smell and the fire hazard keep you awake, but they are also too expensive for you to waste

procrastinating. The best part: depending on the size, these candles need to stay lit for a minimum of two hours to prevent caving, so you can't just blow them out either. Finish whatever you were (or weren't) doing and start procrastinating again once you're done.

Procrastinate, but on a schedule

When making a routine, it is crucial to allocate some free time if you simply cannot stop procrastinating. It's better to waste an

hour if it makes you feel better, instead of wasting the entire day because you weren't in the mood to get things done.

Also, remember to be kind to yourself. Procrastination happens to the best of us, so don't beat yourself up over it. Forgive yourself and move on. Experiment with these tips a bit, and you might just be able to free yourself from the sticky threads of procrastination.



ILLUSTRATION: ABIR HOSSAIN