

Dr. Ainun Nishat talks to BIMRAD Correspondent about COP26

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Professor Emeritus, Centre for Climate Change and Environmental Research, BRAC University.

Bangladesh is frequently cited as one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change because of its geographic location and flat deltaic topography with very low elevation. Despite the recent strides towards achieving sustainable development, Bangladesh's potential to sustain its development is faced with significant challenges posed by climate change. Therefore, it is of utmost importance to understand and assess the threats to Bangladesh's population and economic sectors. This threat assessment needs to be completed with a thorough fathoming of our options towards transforming Bangladesh's climate resilience. In December 2015, 195 states signed up to the landmark Paris Agreement. From 31 October to 12 November 2021, COP26 was held in Glasgow where 200 countries participated. These two are the most important global summits for tackling the climate change. In these summits goals were set, and countries are taking steps to deliver on them. But, are the countries actually on track to achieve the targets set by the Paris Agreement or COP26?

The UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP) is the world's most important summit on climate change. Climate change experts had described this year's conference COP26 as the most significant climate event since the 2015 Paris Agreement. As the current Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) presidency, Bangladesh released Climate Vulnerable Manifesto on 07



September 2021 following the CVF high-level exchange on the COP26. In this backdrop, what have we achieved from COP26 and what should be our future strategy? PAAL correspondent talked to Dr. Ainun Nishat, an Emeritus Professor at Center of Climate Change and Environmental Research, BRAC University, in quest of these answers.

Professor Ainun Nishat is recognized as a pioneering expert in water resource management and climate change in Bangladesh. He represented Bangladesh at the United Nations Economic and Social Council in the Committee for Energy and National Resources Development and the UNFCCC. He worked on different climate change-related projects, which included the third climate change assessment of IPCC. The professor was a key member of experts that prepared the National Adaptation Program of Action (NAPA-2005), Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP 2008 and 2009). Also, he was one of the Lead Authors of Working Group-II of IPCC in preparation for the Third Assessment Report. Dr. Nishat has worked with various international organizations, including World Bank, ADB and several UN

agencies. As an expert in water resource management, he was a member of the Indo-Bangladesh Joint River Commission (JRC). He was also a member of the Bangladesh delegations in COP26.

BIMRAD Correspondent: The 26th UN Climate Change Conference of the Parties (COP26) has just taken place in Glasgow, UK; what is your evaluation, and what have we achieved from this conference?

Dr. Nishat: Well, in the 2015 Paris Climate Change Conference, it was decided to keep the global temperature well below 2°C compared to pre-industrial levels and pursued efforts to limit the temperature increase to 1.5°C, Negotiators at the United Nations climate talks in Glasgow, Scotland, struck a global climate deal to reduce emissions in line with an ambition to limit global warming to well below 2°C and ideally 1.5°C by 2030. But as mitigation measures, how much carbon emission needs to be cut off for member countries that had not been finalized yet.

In Glasgow, the world admitted to providing 80 billion USD and committed to raising 20 billion USD by 2022. There was also a commitment by participating countries to boost this climate-related finance and support to help LDCs. It has been decided that the fund allocation management strategy should be followed correctly. Half of the fund should be provided before adaptation the rest should be kept for mitigation. Each country should also have their additional internal fund, Technology transfer, capacity development and transparency were also fixed in the Glasgow conference. The fund should be used transparently, and it should be utilized in partnership with civil society and private sectors. In COP26, the

decision has been taken about the close involvement of the private sectors and other stakeholders.

COP26 has also given an alarm to Bangladesh for handling climate funds. Few criteria have been finalized like accountability, transparency, inclusiveness, partnership, MRV (Measurement, Reporting and Verification) in COP26 before transferring funds in any country. I think Bangladesh needs to be prepared to fulfill these criteria to get the climate funds in future.

Bangladesh has a definite target for climate change issues. My suggestion is to reach the target globally. Bangladesh can talk in subgroups, then LDCs and then G77. Subsequently, it will be placed at the global level.

BIMRAD Correspondent: Reaching a consensus, especially the core debating issues like reducing Carbon emission and fossil fuel dependency, will be complex. Out of the 135 countries pledging carbon neutrality, only 66 have put a target year on their policies, laws or propositions in COP26. Considering the global economic recession due to the pandemic and economic interest of individual nations, how realistic will be their implementation?

Dr. Nishat: Yes, it is a matter of consideration. All the countries have agreed to complete the pledging process by November 2022. Significantly, only 10% of countries emit almost 80% of global carbon emissions. Surprisingly, India and China are under these 10% countries, So, there is a big gap between agreement and the present real scenario. I think it should be handled separately, The IPCC's latest findings say 1.5°C warmings will be reached or exceeded in the early 2030s. My suggestion is even limiting global

temperature to 2°C by 2030 is also good enough as science is advancing simultaneously to adopt the situation with new inventions and technologies.

BIMRAD Correspondent: About the Climate finance of the Paris Agreement, which was started at COP16 (Cancun) to COP26 (Glasgow), the pledge by the developed countries was that they would provide USD 100 billion a year to support the developing countries to tackle climate change from 2020 onwards, and the amount would be increased after five years. So far, no concrete framework, roadmap or consensus has been seen to deliver the fund. As a developing country and the worst sufferer of Climate Change, how do you regard the overall stance of developed countries?

Dr. Nishat: It is not true that funds have not been committed. They have committed between 60 to 80 billion USD, and they have admitted that they have a shortfall of 20 billion USD, which they want to make up within next year, and separate committees have been set up to sort it out.

Even with 80 billion USD, are the developing countries ready to utilize it? Number 100 is a magic number, and it is being fulfilled rather than the distribution mechanisms through GCF or GEF. The world has admitted that they have not reached the magic number, but whatever money they have committed is more than enough for the countries' need right now.

BIMRAD Correspondent: The world has seen hotter average temperatures throughout the last three years. The experts are predicting a rise in average temperature throughout this decade. Would you please give us an idea about how this temperature anomaly may affect marine biodiversity, coastal

irrigation and marine aquaculture and your suggestions to mitigate it?

Dr. Nishat: It is out of our imagination. The marine ecosystem is the function of the ocean current, and it is changing. As the global temperature increases, ice melts fast from the arctic, resulting from changing ocean currents and altering the aquatic habitat. So, this has a significant impact on countries that generally depend on marine living resources like fish. A sufficient amount of greenhouse accumulated in the atmosphere should remain in the arctic for at least 30 to 40 years more. Therefore, we should plan our adaptation very strongly. The drainage system should develop adequately all over the country. Already Bangladesh Government has taken many adaptation strategies, but it needs holistic approaches. We need to redesign, replan, and research new cultivars. According to IPCC-6 (Volume 1), if the world cannot control the temperature at 4°C, many unforeseen consequences will happen, including the inundation of coastal cities and exacerbated water scarcity in many regions. Bangladesh is also vulnerable to all these phenomena. Such kinds of predictions are models based on reasonable knowledge. I believe Bangladesh can acknowledge the climate change vulnerabilities. We already have a vulnerability map and now need proper actions.

BIMRAD Correspondent: Approximately 30% of the population of Bangladesh lives along the coastal zone of Bangladesh. Their livelihood is heavily dependent upon the seas and adjoining areas. What are the threats posed to the coastal community of Bangladesh and their livelihood from the effects of Climate Change, and how should we be prepared to face it?

Dr. Nishat: Nobody knows the answer. A vast area will be under saline water. Maybe there will be more saltwater fish rather than freshwater fish. But the flora would be changed. There will not be a single Shundori plant in the Sundarban. It will be replaced by the Goran tree. The huge natural ecosystem-based change will occur with the change of climate. That may create severe food crises from all around the country.

But, we can develop polders vigorously and develop a proper drainage system so that the saline water may not cover the freshwater. Projecting the vulnerabilities, experts should come forward to find out the solutions. Yet, no such vital initiatives have been made. Things should be kept in mind that regional cooperation is also essential. We may protect the eastern or mid-southern districts by ourselves, but districts like Satkhira will be the most affected, and we cannot protect Satkhira without the cooperation of India. So, regional cooperation is a mandatory factor. However, keeping all these things in mind, the earliest response from the experts is essential.

BIMRAD Correspondent: Bangladesh has been carrying out mitigation, adaptation planning and implementation for quite a long time and has formulated

strategies to lessen the impact of Climate Change. Do you suggest any changes to these policies or strategies to leave a better Bangladesh for our next generation?

Dr. Nishat: Just think, Bangladesh contributes only 0.3% of global emissions. As a mitigation strategy, if Bangladesh cut down 100% of these emissions, actually nothing would happen to the world.

In this present situation, Bangladesh needs to keep track of the world's technological advances, Bangladesh has the highest number of solar energy sources globally, but the qualities are the worst. The capacity is almost one-fourth of the global capacity. Bangladesh will release the final volume on "adaptation" by the end of April, where there will be some adaptation directions.

As a Team Leader, I have already developed a "Climate change strategy and action plan", which is also a helpful document. That may guide the directions to adapt and handle climate change in Bangladesh.

BIMRAD Correspondent: Thank you very much for your pragmatic answers. BIMRAD wishes all the best to you.