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## **THE 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC SUMMIT: ISSUES, OUTCOME AND IMPLICATIONS FOR BANGLADESH**

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### **Abstract**

This paper attempts to analyse the discussed issues and outcomes of the seventeenth SAARC Summit which took place in the Maldives from 10-11 November 2011 with a special reference to Bangladesh in the context of regional cooperation. Several significant and strategically important agreements were signed during this Summit with the intention to begin a new era of cooperation among the member countries. Therefore, the Summit declaration adopted several treaties like SAARC Agreement on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters, SAARC Seed Bank, SAARC Agreement on Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment, and the SAARC Agreement on Implementation of Regional Standards. The agreements focused on enhancing and facilitating regional transit and connectivity, economic growth, ensuring energy security, combating terrorism and human trafficking and fight climate change. Though the Summit has come up with some promising mutual agreements, its success will depend on their proper and timely implementation. The lack of political will, problem of poor governance, weak economy and disparity, crisis of political leadership, ethnic, socio-cultural and religious divisions, challenges of non-state actors, transnational security challenges are considered to be the major hindrances to the success of regional integration. The South Asian region should develop its own short, medium, and long-term strategies for economic integration where each stage should be implemented effectively before moving on to the next in order to build a sound foundation for progress. The inclusion of China as 'dialogue partner' would help SAARC to make the tangible progress for regional cooperation in South Asia. The new focus on regional integrations is likely to create exciting opportunities for Bangladesh if it can exploit the synergies based on comparative advantages, investment in cross-border infrastructure projects, address challenges in governance, environmental and social developments.

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## 1. Introduction

The 17th South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) Summit was held in the Maldives on 10-11 November 2011. The theme of the Summit was 'Building Bridges'- both in terms of physical connectivity and figurative political dialogue which emphasised more on the people-to-people linkages than the state centric approach. It concluded with the adoption of 20 Points Addu Declaration<sup>1</sup>. The declaration, jointly adopted by the eight SAARC member countries (Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka) reaffirmed their commitments to peace, confidence building, liberty, human dignity, democracy, mutual respect, good governance, and human rights. The Summit, also attended by nine representatives (Australia, China, Iran, Japan, Korea, Mauritius, Myanmar, the United States of America and the European Union) from observer states, and renewed its firm commitment to alleviate poverty and reduce income inequalities within the societies and reaffirmed its resolve to improve the quality of life and well-being of their people through people-centred sustainable development. The Summit welcomed the signing of SAARC Agreements on Rapid Response to Natural Disasters, SAARC Seed Bank, SAARC Agreement on Multilateral Arrangement on Recognition of Conformity Assessment, and the SAARC Agreement on Implementation of Regional Standards. The "Addu Declaration" also expressed its deep concern about the continuing threat of terrorism in all its forms and manifestations, transnational organised crimes, especially illegal trafficking in narcotics drugs, trafficking in persons and small arms, and increased incidents of maritime piracy in the region and reiterated its resolve to fight all such menaces. The Summit also expressed concern on the environmental degradation and vulnerabilities of the region to the threat of climate change. The Summit also emphasised the need to further strengthen the institutional mechanism of SAARC in order to bolster and enhance the regional cooperation.

SAARC is the cooperative security structure which links countries stretching from Afghanistan in the West to Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Maldives. Myanmar is contiguous to SAARC and is the land bridge with the ASEAN. Moreover, China was seeking an active role such as 'Dialogue Partner' of SAARC because of its investment in the economies of many member states in this region often by dispensing aid, and soft loans for infrastructures. Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Maldives, and Sri Lanka appeared in favour of China although India would likely be suspicious of any greater role of China within SAARC. Over the years SAARC has taken some important steps in regional cooperation, however, the potential remains unrealised due to political,

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<sup>1</sup> "17th Saarc summit adopts 'Addu Declaration', *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 12 November 2011.

economic, historical differences as well as lack of geographic congruity. In such a background, the objectives of the paper are:

- To discuss the main issues of the 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit
- To analyse the outcome of SAARC Summit for regional cooperation
- To find out the options and challenges for Bangladesh in the context of regional cooperation.

The paper is divided into five sections including the introductory section. The second section deals with the major issues discussed in the 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit. The third section discusses about the outcome of Summit for the cooperation of South Asian countries. Options and Challenges of regional cooperation from Bangladesh perspective are highlighted in section four. The final provides the concluding remarks of the paper with some recommendations for mutual benefits of the South Asian countries.

## **2. The 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit: Issues Discussed**

The “Addu Declaration” shed some of the despondency reflected in the previous Summit held in Thimphu. While the Thimphu Declaration had disappointed over a “number of initiatives not translating into tangible and meaningful benefits to the people,” the latest one welcomed the Summit recognising the importance of “bridging differences”. The main issues discussed in the 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit were, therefore, described below:

***Regional Connectivity:*** The member states emphasised the need to conclude Regional Railways Agreement and to convene the Export Group Meeting on the Motor Vehicles Agreement before the next session of Council of Ministers and conduct a demonstration run of a container train among Bangladesh, India and Nepal. In this respect, the eight leaders at the Summit decided to finalise a Regional Railways Agreement and complete the preparatory work on an Indian Ocean Cargo and Passenger Ferry Service by the end of 2011.

***Intra-Regional Trade and Economic Growth:*** The declaration called for SAARC finance ministers to prepare a proposal that would allow greater flow of financial capital and intra-regional long term investment. On the trade front, emphasis was on effective implementation of the free trade pact, paring the sensitive lists, eliminating non-tariff barriers and harmonising standards and customs procedures. All these factors have limited the SAARC trade to 10 per cent of its actual potential.

***Food Security:*** The members agreed to resolve the operational issues related to the SAARC Seed Bank by the next session of the Council of Ministers to ensure its effective functioning. This will help greater availability of quality seeds and spread of high yielding improved crop varieties, exchange of seeds and plant genetic resources and sharing of the practices, technologies, and techniques.

**Energy Cooperation:** The Summit agreed to make available no less than two per cent of the national income towards the respective countries' renewable energy investments. It also agreed to dedicate more financial resources towards developing renewable energy in the respective countries. The leaders agreed to direct the conclusion of the Inter-governmental Framework Agreement for Energy Cooperation and the Study on the Regional Power Exchange Concept.

**Environmental Degradation and Climate Change:** The declaration agreed to ensure timely implementation of the Thimpu Statement on Climate Change.

**Prevention of Terrorism and Arms and Drug Trafficking:** In the declaration, the SAARC nations called for an early conclusion of the proposed UN Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism and completion of the ratification of the SAARC Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters.

**Development and Promotion of Tourism Industries:** The Summiters agreed to hold the twelfth SAARC Trade Fair along with SAARC Travel and Tourism Fair in the Maldives in 2012<sup>2</sup>; and to develop modalities by involving the relevant private sectors in promoting the region globally as 'Destination South Asia'.

**Maritime Piracy:** The member states agreed to set up a mechanism to deal with piracy in the Indian Ocean.

**Poverty Alleviation:** The member countries also renewed their firm commitment to alleviate poverty and reduce income inequalities within their societies and reaffirmed its resolve to improve the quality of life and well-being of their people through people-centred sustainable development.

**Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation:** To address the common challenge of sanitation and access to safe drinking water in the region, SAARC will formulate an actionable framework.

**Exchange Programme among Academic and Research Institutions:** The leaders will also strive to expedite the work on mutual recognition of academic and professional degrees and harmonisation of academic standards; and establishment of long-term linkages among the universities, research institutions and think-tanks.

### 3. The Outcome of the 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit

South Asia is home to 22 per cent of the total population of the world and accounts for 5.9 per cent of global GDP.<sup>3</sup> In terms of human development index

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<sup>2</sup> "SAARC countries need to cooperate: PM", *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 12 November 2011.

<sup>3</sup> Sustainability and Equity: A Better Future for All, United Nation Human Development Report 2011, United Nation Development Programme, 2011.

(HDI), the countries of the region are ranked quite low, i.e., in the overall list of 182 countries, Sri Lanka occupies the best rank of 97 while Afghanistan is ranked 172 (See annex 1).<sup>4</sup> Lack of economic cooperation has stifled cooperation in other areas like fighting poverty, illiteracy, crisis in governance and terrorism, improving agriculture, communication links, intra-regional tourism, people-to-people-contact. Even if SAARC member countries have pledged to get together “to work together in a spirit of friendship, trust and understanding” and aim “to accelerate the process of economic and social development in Member States”, in reality the organisation’s activities have been hamstrung by political differences among them. The followings are the outcome of some pertinent discussed issues in the 17<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit.

***Transit and Connectivity:*** South Asia inherited an integrated transport infrastructure from the British. This was fractured not only by the partition of India but by its political aftermath. The transport network still continues to remain fragmented due to various historical, political and economic reasons which needs to be rebuilt within the context of greater political harmony in South Asia. There is no authentic estimate of the possible benefits that each of the four countries (Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and India) will get if regional connectivity/transit are opened up. Transit may be on the issue of bilateral trade with India and Nepal. The Asian Highway (AH) and the Trans Asian Railway (TAR) projects of UNESCAP have identified the major road and rail links among the countries of South-Asia (See annex 2).<sup>5</sup> The SAARC Regional Multimodal Transport System (SRMTS) also identified a number of routes in road, rail, Inland Water Transport and aviation which could provide efficient regional connectivity. Bangladesh has signed TAR and agreed to implement the recommendation of SRMTS.<sup>6</sup> To implement the recommendations of TAR and SRMTS, a technical committee will be formed to do the feasibility study in terms of available roads and other infrastructures, markets, ports, safety nets against trafficking of arms and undue infiltration of regional/sub-regional goods to the detriment of local markets and tight security measures against terrorism with check posts at strategic points. The Finance Ministers of the SAARC countries have been called upon “to chart proposals” to allow greater financial capital flows for long term regional investment. In the transport sector, early conclusion of the regional railways agreement and ‘demonstration run’ of a container train linking Bangladesh, India and Nepal has been called for considering the practical obstacles. The General Secretary of SAARC has been directed to complete work for a more extensive Indian Ocean Cargo and Passenger Ferry Service.

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>5</sup> Dr. Mohammad Mohiuddin Abdullah, “Transit and Connectivity: Regional Approach”, *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, Bangladesh, 28 March 2011.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*

**Regional Integration and Economic Growth:** While South Asia made significant progress in integrating with the global economy, integration within the region remained limited. Restrictive policies within the region have neutralised the beneficial effects of common cultural affinity, common geography, and the ‘gravitational’ pull of proximity on movement of goods and people within the region. All these factors have limited the SAARC trade to 10 per cent of its actual potential.<sup>7</sup> South Asia is the least integrated region in the world, where integration is measured by intraregional trade in goods, capital, and ideas. Intraregional trade as a share of total trade is the lowest for South Asia (see Annex 3). There is little cross-border investment within South Asia. The flow of ideas, crudely measured by the cross-border movement of people, or the number of telephone calls, or the purchase of technology and royalty payments, are all low for South Asia. In South Asia, only 7 per cent of international telephone calls are regional, compared to 71 per cent for East Asia.<sup>8</sup>

India decided to reduce the sensitive list for the least developed countries under the South Asian Free Trade Area Agreement from 480 to 25 tariff lines.<sup>9</sup> Currently, South Asia’s intraregional trade has stalled at around 2 per cent of its total trade volume since 1980 and 5 per cent of their gross domestic product which represents only a third of the region’s GDP. South Asian Free Trade Area’s (SAFTA) trade liberalisation programme included terms and timeline for tariff reductions, sensitive lists, rules of origin, revenue compensation mechanisms, and special and differential treatment for Least Developed Countries. However, the regulations stipulated under SAFTA do not have enough tools to be effective. As a result, bilateral trade agreements between South Asian countries continue to play a more prominent role than SAFTA in governing trade flows.

**Energy Cooperation:** The economic growth of South Asian countries is constrained by significant shortages in energy supply. Unless the corrective steps are urgently initiated and implemented it may be difficult to sustain this growth rates. The followings are some of the key challenges faced by the South Asian countries are: i) South Asia lags behind most other regions in terms of trade in electricity and gas, ii) Energy endowments differ among the South Asian countries, but energy trade in the region is low, iii) Only India, Bhutan, and Nepal currently trade electricity, iv) The national energy systems—gas and electricity networks—in the South Asian countries are largely isolated from each other v) There are no gas pipelines crossing the national borders, whether within South Asia or between South Asia and its neighbours vi) Consequently, optimal

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<sup>7</sup> Thomas W. Hertel and Tasneem Mirza, “The Role of Trade Facilitation in South Asian Economic Integration”, Chapter 2, World Bank Report, 2007.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> Sadiq Ahmed and Ejaj Ghani, “South Asia’s Growth and Regional Integration: An Overview”, Part I, *South Asia and Regional Integration*, World Bank, 2007, p. 2.

development of the region's internal energy resources is hampered and access to the significant energy resources in the neighbouring countries denied, which increases the cost of energy supply and reduces energy security of the individual countries and of the region as a whole, vii) The region produced only about 4 per cent of the world's electricity viii) The average annual electricity consumption per capita is only one sixth of the world average.

However, there are still huge opportunities for South Asian countries (according to World Bank<sup>10</sup>) in regards to energy cooperation such as: i) Differing resource endowments, development needs, and demand patterns among the countries in the region and its neighbourhood create significant opportunities for cooperation and trade in the energy sector. ii) Pakistan and Afghanistan are geographically well placed to play an important role as transit states for the rest of South Asia, as they provide the best route for access to Central Asia's energy iii) Bhutan's unexploited hydropower potential exceeds 23,000 MW and Nepal's exceeds 43,000 MW iv) Bhutan's electricity export is expected to be 25 per cent of its GDP and 60 per cent of its state revenues v) Iran-Pakistan-India Natural Gas Pipeline (IPI) could supply 150 million cubic meters/day of gas to India and 60 million of gas to Pakistan.

In such a background, the Summit called for developing and sharing of regional hydro-electric potentiality (see Annex 4), grid connectivity, and gas pipelines and urged for commissioning a definite survey to determine actual quantum of energy resources. A Framework for Energy Cooperation Agreement is envisaged despite the obstacles it faces. This would include harnessing more hydro-power. Prime Minister, Sheikh Hasina called for 'Institutional and Co-riparian Cooperation' of the Ganges Brahmaputra river basins to facilitate integrated development of water resources to nourish agriculture and provide access to safe water to benefit a billion people.

One of the main drivers of economic integration in South Asia is the need for greater energy security. All these countries are heavily dependent on energy imports and even more specifically on hydrocarbon imports from West Asia. At the greater Asian regional level the SAARC economies can be seen to offer a unified market for hydrocarbon imports from Central and West Asian gas and oil fields by overland pipelines, and hydrocarbon resources can then be exploited on a regional demand and stock supply. Energy trade in the region can also be seen as a confidence-building measure and a lock-in mechanism for irreversible

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<sup>10</sup> "Potential and Prospects for Regional Energy Trade in the South Asia Region", Formal Report 334/08, Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme and the South Asia Regional Cooperation Programme, World Bank, 2008, available at: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publications/448813-1219694050026/Regional\\_Energy\\_Trade\\_in\\_South\\_Asia\\_Final\\_ESMAP.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publications/448813-1219694050026/Regional_Energy_Trade_in_South_Asia_Final_ESMAP.pdf), accessed on 15 June 2012 .

economic interdependence. With Afghanistan's membership in the SAARC, the region can expect further potential gains through alliance with Central Asian countries. In particular, it provides greater connectivity with Central Asia and beyond, and brings in significant energy security payoffs.

**Terrorism, Maritime Piracy, Arms and Drug Trafficking:** The major states of the region are locked in a counter-productive arms race and competition for acquiring nuclear capability which is threatening long-term social and economic well-being of the people. The nuclear dimension has changed the dynamics of regional security of South Asia and raised the level of international concern. However, simultaneously, there is a growing realisation of common challenges confronting these states today in the shape of non-traditional security threats, i.e., transnational crimes and terrorism, ethnic and religious violence, illegal migration, proliferation of small arms, drug trafficking (see Annex 5), spread of infectious diseases, climate change and environment, etc. This list is growing as the states are getting increasingly aware of their limitations in dealing with these issues individually.

Terrorism and trans-border crimes have increased manifold in South Asia in the post-cold war days raising the level of mistrust and suspicions amongst nations and peoples. The ethno-cultural diversity of the region and overlapping of ethnic, religious, and linguistic identities across states, it is but natural that interstate relations will be affected by internal politics.

Piracy in the Indian sub continent continues unabated but is restricted to respective countries territorial waters. However, there is no mechanism for regional approach to combating piracy. The agreements are restricted to bilateral arrangements, which appear to have worked well. It must be remembered that piracy is only one component of "disorder at sea" and South Asian countries need to follow an integrated approach to the challenge, "disorder at sea".

In the context of South Asia, the twin issues of 'freedom from want and freedom from fear' - the two main components of human security- are far from realisation when one observes that issues of poverty, deprivation, environmental degradation are mixed with class, caste and group violence and the political process is manipulated by rigging, black money, and extortion. This has affected the process of evolution of an efficient, effective, and visionary leadership. No wonder, efforts aimed at regional and sub-regional cooperation remained largely unsuccessful and often became subjects of controversy for the want of any creative thinking.

**Food Security:** The increasing pressure on land, marginalisation of small and marginal farmers, frequent occurrence of natural calamities, deteriorating level of soil fertility have all made food security a major concern for the states of the region. Food security is defined in terms of the availability of food to meet the present and future needs of the people. There is also the problem of making it



accessible to all irrespective of class, gender, ethnic, religious or other considerations. The principles guides for food security are availability, access, adequacy, policy, and processes of public policy and system of governance.

A substantial part of the food security challenge is, hence, akin to the challenge of lifting growth and farm productivity in South Asia's rural areas, many of which are located in lagging regions. Indeed, a major dichotomy underlying South Asia's economic transformation has been the continued strong reliance on low-productivity agriculture for income for over 50 per cent of the population, even as the share of agriculture in GDP has shrunk from around 50 per cent in 1970 to less than 20 per cent in 2007. Poverty analysis at country levels shows that over 80 per cent of South Asia's poor are located in rural areas, of whom over 50 per cent are engaged in agriculture.

At the Thimpu SAARC Summit in April 2010, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina proposed to establish a regional seed bank, which was incorporated in the Thimpu Declaration. The SAARC leaders directed the agriculture ministers to start work for this. Bangladesh then prepared a concept paper and distributed it among all the member-states through the SAARC Secretariat. SAARC seed bank came into being through an agreement at the New Delhi SAARC Summit in 2007, is yet to be functional."So, it is high time the SAARC leaders give another big push so that the seed bank becomes operational," said one official, seeking anonymity.<sup>11</sup>

The agreement signed at the New Delhi Summit provided for building a stock of 2,41,580 tonnes of food grains from the original member-states of SAARC.<sup>12</sup> Contribution of Afghanistan was left to be added since it was yet to join the regional forum. At the first meeting of the Food Bank Board in Colombo in October 2008, Afghanistan agreed to contribute 1,420 tonnes (of wheat), raising the total to 2,43,000 tonnes. The board's third meeting in Kabul in November 2009 recommended doubling the food stock to 4,86,000 tonnes given the rising need in the region.<sup>13</sup>

South Asian countries have succeeded over the past decades to attain a level of self-sufficiency or near-self-sufficiency in food grains. This has been a remarkable achievement. But the natural disasters and state policy failures often lead to crises, and serious deprivation occurs for the poorer segments of the region that constitutes an overwhelming part of the population. The crisis of rice and other grains in Bangladesh due to environmental disaster illustrates the vulnerability of a large number of people and the lack of concerted action by the

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<sup>11</sup> Reaz Ahmed, "Saarc nations push for seed bank: Agriculture ministers meet in Dhaka Wednesday", *The Financial Express*, 08 November 2011.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*

regional states. Ensuing no significant strategies have been drawn up over the years in this region. Indeed, regional cooperation is imperative to meet such common challenges.

**Water Dispute:** The issue of water is another crucial area where states of South Asia have hitherto failed to evolve a common approach. The Ganges is one of the mightiest rivers in the world and determines the fate of millions of people living by its sides. The water dispute between India and Bangladesh has continued for a long period from the late 1950s when India drew up a plan to construct the Farakka barrage. The claims and counter-claims leading to a series of negotiations produced a water-sharing arrangement in 1977 for a short period. The question of long-term sharing of Ganges water created lot of mistrust and suspicions between the two friendly countries. The 1996 Water Treaty with a sharing formula and guaranteed clause has not been able to meet the need for the flow and utilisation of water during the lean season. The issue has also been taken by Bangladesh to the United Nations, but it has not yet been resolved despite flurries of negotiations. The water dispute between India and Bangladesh can be regarded as an early-warning for many such resource-based disputes in future which can have enormous security ramifications.

**Challenge of Climate Change:** There is a hard realisation in South Asia that natural disasters like floods, cyclones, earthquakes, and Tsunami pose serious threats to regional development. All the South Asian countries are facing the effect of climate change (more details in Annex 6). Though Bangladesh is the most vulnerable of them, the 17th SAARC host country, the Maldives who is not less vulnerable than Bangladesh. Sri Lanka is also in same condition. In fact, these phenomena related to the issue of climate change constitute a common challenge for all the states and require collective action at the national, regional and global levels. The 15<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit in Colombo in August 2008 reiterated the need for an integrated action programme in this regard in collaboration with the global community. It is now urgent that a comprehensive adaptation plan be developed with mutual collaboration among the neighbouring countries under the SAARC umbrella for dealing with climate change impact and adaptation issues. The SAARC Meteorological Research located in Dhaka, which has some experience in this field may work as a regional platform for this purpose.

#### **4. Bangladesh and SAARC: Areas for Regional Cooperation and Challenges**

Regional integration will create exciting opportunities for Bangladesh for exploiting synergies based on comparative advantages, investment in cross-border infrastructure projects, and through coordinated programmes to address challenges in governance, environment, social development, and other fields that spill over national boundaries. A most recent example of cross-border investment

is the US\$255 million Lafarge Surma Cement plant sponsored by the Lafarge Group of France. The plant, which is due to be commissioned in 2005, is located at Chatak, Sylhet, in Bangladesh.<sup>14</sup> The main source of raw material is a limestone quarry in Meghalaya, north-east of India, connected by a 17 km cross-border long-belt conveyer. The project has created about 400 jobs in Sylhet and about 70 jobs in Meghalaya.<sup>15</sup>

The region is locked into a set of common problems that can be resolved only through regional cooperation. For example, most of Nepal's rivers flow into Uttar Pradesh and Bihar in India. Indeed the tributaries in Nepal that feed the Ganges join up in Uttar Pradesh and Bihar before entering West Bengal and Bangladesh. Therefore, in harnessing the waters of the Ganges, India needs Nepal's active participation. Similarly, any programme of water management by Bangladesh, whether for flood control or irrigation, will not be feasible without the ultimate collaboration of the upper riparian states of India and Nepal. With proper planning and investment, the water resources of the region could well be used for the generation of electricity. Another important potential resource in the region comes from the huge reserve of coal in Assam, Bihar, Orissa, and West Bengal. A large reserve of natural gas is found in Bangladesh and the north-eastern part of India.<sup>16</sup>

Sixty years ago, the transport networks of South Asia were one of the most integrated in the developing world, but these were disrupted following the partition of the region into seven independent states. At present, highways, waterways, and rail links that traverse each country stop at national borders and thus are unable to serve the region. The rebuilding of this physical infrastructure has been constrained by security-driven apprehensions, which the countries found impelling enough to sacrifice mutual economic benefits. In the process of rebuilding the transport infrastructure of the eastern region of South Asia, Bangladesh emerges as the hub around which reconstruction of land links could take place. Bangladesh once had a major highway linking mainland India with both north Bengal and north-east India. The development of land alignments, which would provide north-east India access to the sea through the Bay of Bengal and integrate its market with Bangladesh, could establish this undeveloped region as a staging post for economic links within South Asia and

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<sup>14</sup> Yousuf A Harun, "Regional Cooperation in South Asia: Bangladesh Perspective", in Ashok Behuria (ed.), *South Asia: Quest for Regional Cooperation*, IDSA, India, 2009.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>16</sup> "Potential and prospects for Regional Energy Trade in the South Asia Region", Formal Report 334/08, Energy Sector Management Assistance Programme and the South Asia Regional Cooperation Programme, World Bank, 2008, available at: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publications/448813-1219694050026/Regional\\_Energy\\_Trade\\_in\\_South\\_Asia\\_Final\\_ESMAP.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/SOUTHASIAEXT/Resources/Publications/448813-1219694050026/Regional_Energy_Trade_in_South_Asia_Final_ESMAP.pdf), accessed on 15 June 2012 .

with landlocked south-west China. The Chittagong port could be built up as the nodal point for handling the region's trade.

There are several sectors in which Bangladesh and India can move from a competitive relationship toward a rediscovery of lost complementarity. Jute is one example, and Ready Made Garments of Bangladesh and the textile industry of India is another. The European Union has allowed Bangladesh special market access, if its raw material is sourced regionally under a regional accumulation system. In the case of Bangladesh, only 65 per cent of total exports to the European Union can access the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) because of noncompliance with rules of origin.<sup>17</sup> With regional accumulation, it can increase to 90 per cent. If Bangladesh accepts regional accumulation, there could be a significant increase in intraregional trade. Unfortunately, as of early 2009, the powerful textile manufacturing lobby in Bangladesh has prevailed on the government not to accept regional accumulation.

Tourism has remained untapped in the region, attracting less than 1 per cent of the international tourist arrivals, although the cultural and natural riches of the region are beyond dispute. Whether it is ecotourism, religious tourism, or adventure tourism, the region has a spectacular variety of tourism to offer.

Bangladesh might face some trans-national security threats along with the above mentioned opportunities of regional cooperation. The following are some of the major transnational security challenges from Bangladesh perspective:

- Transit of arms and drugs through Bangladeshi territory
- Border Skirmishes – intrusions, abductions, forcible harvesting, shooting, and killing along the Bangladesh-India borders.
- Insurgency Problems in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) continue to pose risks to Bangladesh security.
- Piracy and dumping in the Bay of Bengal is a common phenomenon today and it is likely to increase in the coming years.
- Water diversion in the upstream countries and climate change.

If Bangladesh engage itself in the regional cooperation among the SAARC countries, the positive outcomes are likely to be far more advantageous than the challenges ahead. So, Bangladesh should try to figure out how it can minimise those challenges and prepare itself to embrace the full benefits of the regional cooperation.

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<sup>17</sup> Susil Sirivardana, "Pro-Poor Thought and Strategy: Major Impediments amidst Groundswell of Change", in Ashok Behuria (ed.) *South Asia: Quest for Regional Cooperation*, IDSA, India, 2009.

## 5. Initiatives for Enhancing Regional Cooperation

The lack of political will, problem of governance, economic underdevelopment and disparity, crisis of political leadership, ethnic, socio-cultural and religious divisions, challenge of non-state actors and transnational security challenges are considered to be the major hindrances to the success of regional integration. Another important missing ingredient is a shared perception of common benefit—all the members must feel they are sharing the costs and benefits of the cooperation equally. The South Asian region should develop its own short, medium, and long-term strategies for economic integration. Each stage should be implemented effectively before moving on to the next in order to build a sound foundation for progress.<sup>18</sup> South Asian countries need to address the following key issues, however, to move toward successful cooperation.

***Political Environment:*** The political environment needs to be improved by the regional governments and political leaders.

***Complementarities:*** A careful identification of areas in which South Asian countries have comparative advantage and greater potential for growth based on sound economic ground is required, along with a strategy for cooperation focusing on intra-SAARC trade, joint ventures, and third country exports.

***Trade Reform and Facilitations:*** Trade reform and facilitations require complementary policies such as a regulatory framework, improved governance, stable law and order, reduced corruption, upgraded infrastructure, and an improved overall investment climate.

***Transport:*** The route criteria for Asian Land Transportation Infrastructure Development should include capital-to-capital links, connection to main industrial and agricultural centers and growth zones, connection to major sea and river ports, and connection to major inland container terminals and depots.

***Port:*** The port now requires massive infrastructure development, including deepwater facilities and an enhanced capacity to handle growing containerised traffic and complete automation of its services.

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<sup>18</sup> In this context, the development of the European Union may be studied, which is considered to be the most advanced model for regional grouping. European integration evolved over four stages: First, a preferential free trade regime was developed in which member countries reduced or eliminated tariff and nontariff barriers among them; Second, a Customs Union created a common external tariff so that import duties were the same for each member country; Third, the Economic Union was formed, which further integrated the market, eventually leading to a single market, Fourth, a monetary union was established in which the national currencies of the member countries were replaced by a single currency.

**Energy:** Initiatives need to be taken for the formulation of plans to develop hydro, gas, and coal-based power generation, and to establish a regional power grid. Although tremendous potential exists for power generation, most of the countries are faced with power shortages and rising demand.

**Water Resources:** An intergovernmental task force should formulate plans for the comprehensive development of water resources in the Ganges–Brahmaputra–Meghna river basin for flood management, irrigation, water transport, and electricity generation.

**Telecommunication:** The telecommunication technology of the member countries could be harmonised for the socioeconomic advancement of the region through the establishment of infrastructure and human resource development, and the reduction of intraregional telecom tariffs, cellular roaming, and mutual recognition arrangements.

**Investment:** Investment cooperation is an essential companion to the liberalisation of trade because it is with the intraregional investment that the economies can achieve true industrial and market integration.

**Capital Market:** The setting up of a regional financial center at an appropriate location in the region will facilitate banking and insurance, other financial services, and shipping for intraregional investment as well as identification of lucrative investment opportunities for both FDI and portfolio investment.

**Tourism:** To promote South Asia as a common tourist destination, joint efforts are required in areas such as upgrading infrastructure, improving air linkages, simplifying and harmonising administrative procedures, and developing human resources and joint marketing.

**Human Resource Development:** Poorly developed human resources in the region have led to the scarcity of managerial, entrepreneurial, and technical skills, and the ability to conduct adaptive research is severely constrained. Therefore, improvement in the quality of human resources through education and vocational training is the key to move toward a knowledge based economy.

**Environment:** Effective cooperation among the countries is urgently needed to address issues of deforestation and biodiversity loss, cleaner production, waste, and pollution management; to preserve rare species of wildlife and plants; and to avoid fragmentation of the ecosystem that spans national borders. Cooperation can be strengthened by improving the environmental information systems and management capacities.

**Private Sector:** The role of the private sector is crucial for the successful economic integration of the region. Through close government and private sector partnerships, the intergovernmental policy framework for the expansion of trade and investment can be implemented.

## **6. Conclusion**

The proceedings and outcomes of the 17th SAARC Summit that ended on a positive note with all the members agreeing to infuse new spirit in the organisation and intensify regional cooperation for the collective good. The statements emanating from leaders of the member states and the document adopted at the conclusion clearly show the resolve to make a new beginning of cooperation for socio-economic development of the region. Perhaps the 11th day of the 11th month of 2011 has a magical effect on the moot. There can be no two opinions that the countries constituting SAARC have tremendous resources and potential to grow and address their problems through collaborative efforts. However, the true potential of the Association could not be exploited during 26 long years because of mutual distrust, suspicion and lack of commitment. Though on the sidelines of the SAARC Summits and conferences, bilateral meetings between leaders of the member countries especially Pakistan and India have helped ease out tension as has been the case this time round as well but the institution itself has so far not been allowed to play any role in resolution of conflicts and that is considered to be the major impediment in its growth and effectiveness. Despite resolve and expression of intents to launch projects for regional connectivity and energy corridors one cannot expect any major breakthrough if irritants like Kashmir, Siachin, and Sir Creek remain there or disputes over water sharing persist between Pakistan and India on the one hand and India and Bangladesh on the other. There is a different view as well that mutual collaboration and inter-dependency would help create congenial atmosphere for resolution of the political disputes. Anyhow, it is time for SAARC to move decisively to implement various proposals and plans that are so far confined to papers only. The theme of the Addu Summit was 'Building Bridges' and the member states rightly advanced relevant proposals to realise the objective of bringing them closer through road and rail networks, increased economic interaction and measures to boost mutual confidence.

*Mohammad Atique Rahman*

## **ENSURING EFFECTIVE SOCIAL PROTECTIONS IN BANGLADESH: THE NEED FOR MULTILEVEL GOVERNANCE**

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### **Abstract**

There has been increasing consciousness among the government institutions of Bangladesh about social protections as measures to protect people from becoming trapped into poverty. The country has therefore, been conducting series of Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs) to implement social protections for addressing the needs of the poor and the vulnerable people. These SSNPs range from relief supports for the victims of natural disasters to health and sanitation services, microfinance for rural women, and legal services for establishing citizens' rights. However, with the absence of multilevel governance in the social, political, and economic sectors of Bangladesh, the extensity of social disparity and inequality remained persistently the same. This is an important issue for a country like Bangladesh where social disparity exists both in agency and structure in which both formal and informal political, economic, social, and cultural institutions are restricting people's participation on the basis of wealth, power, and identity. Therefore, while the social protection policies and programmes have greater resonances in Bangladesh, the poorest and the vulnerable communities have not been benefited that much yet. The paper attempts to explore the emerging need for multilevel governance for the social safety net measures in Bangladesh ranging from policy formulations to implementations in effective ways. The paper addresses governance deficits and delineates the need for multilevel governance in Bangladesh. It is argued that administering SSNPs through traditional governance approaches suffer from inefficiency and specificity, thus generate a good deal of debate regarding the sustainability and impacts of SSNPs in Bangladesh. And for some functions associated with the proper delivery of social safety net programmes in Bangladesh, multilevel governance set up is more well suited.

### **1. Introduction**

Social protection has been an eloquent public policy for addressing poverty and social exclusions in Bangladesh. Social protection is provided through social safety net measures, which is a set of public policies and actions that addresses not only income poverty and economic shocks, but

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also socially excluded people who according to Amartya Sen are deprived as such to appear in the public without shame.<sup>19</sup> It is evident that there has been increasing consciousness among the government institutions about social protection as a measure to protect people from becoming trapped into poverty. Bangladesh has implemented series of Social Safety Net Programmes (SSNPs) to provide social protection to the poor and vulnerable people. The country has various government agencies to conduct social protection programmes all over the country. These SSNPs range from relief supports for the victims of natural disasters to health and sanitation services, microfinance for rural women, and legal services for establishing citizens' rights. However, in the absence of multilevel governance in the social, political, and economic sectors of Bangladesh the extensity of social disparity and inequality remained persistently the same. This is an important issue for a country like Bangladesh where social disparity exists both in agency and structure in which formal and informal political, economic, social, and cultural institutions are restricting people's participation on the basis of wealth, power, and identity. In this setting, people (agency) have less participation in the decision-making process and receive few benefits. In this way, people are excluded from the processes of designing social protection measures and the wide range of livelihood strategies. Therefore, while the social protection policies and programmes have greater resonances in Bangladesh, the poorest and the vulnerable communities have not been benefited that much yet.

In such backdrop, the paper attempts to explore the emerging need for multilevel governance for the social safety net measures in Bangladesh ranging from policy formulations to implementations in effective ways. The paper addresses governance deficits and explores the need for multilevel governance in Bangladesh. The paper focuses on three areas where multilevel governance is essential for effective social safety net measures. These are:

1. Administration of the SSNPs;

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<sup>19</sup> Amartya Sen further described socially excluded people as those who may be deprived of a livelihood; secure, permanent employment; earnings; property, credit, or land; housing; minimal or prevailing consumption levels; education, skills, and cultural capital; the welfare state; citizenship and legal equality; democratic participation; public goods; the nation or the dominant race; family and sociability; and humanity, respect, fulfilment and understanding. See Amartya Sen, "Social Exclusion: Concept, Application, and Security", *Social Development Papers No. 1*, Manila: Asian Development Bank, June 2000.

2. Targeting inefficiencies of the SSNPs; and
3. Lack of effectiveness and sustainability of the SSNPs.

Accordingly, the paper is divided into six sections including introduction as section one. Section two addresses the notion of multilevel governance and its relevance for effective social safety net measures. Section three explores the various social protection measures in Bangladesh particularly focusing on policies and the institutions involved. The fourth section analyses the increasing demands for multilevel governance in three areas of existing social protection measures in Bangladesh. For this purpose, some of the social safety net measures are discussed in more detail. Few recommendations have been provided in section five about how to materialise the essential elements of multilevel governance in implementing social protection measures in Bangladesh. Section six draws conclusion of the paper.

## **2. Emergence of Multilevel Governance and its Relevance for Social Protection Measures**

It is imperative to discuss the current discourses on governance before explaining the contours of multilevel governance. The notion of governance emerged in the early 1980s as a popular vocabulary in development literature which refers to the system of government concentrating on effective and accountable institutions, democratic principles, and electoral processes.<sup>20</sup> Governance thus is examined as the manner in which power is exercised in the management of country's economic and social resources for development. In a nutshell, first of all, governance is a process by which governments are selected, held accountable, monitored and replaced. Secondly, governance can be understood as management of resources efficiently, adoption of sound policies and their efficient implementations. And finally, governance is also space creation for the participation of the citizens in the affairs of the state.

In the early nineties, another approach to governance came into spotlight i.e., multilevel governance. The term indicates a changed way of governing. It refers to "a new process of governing or a changed condition

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<sup>20</sup> Patricia McCarney et. al., "Towards an Understanding of Governance: The Emergence of an Idea and its Implications for Urban Research in Developing Countries" in "Perspective on the City", *Urban Research in the Developing World*, Vol. 4, Toronto: Centre for Urban and Community Studies, 1995, p. 4.

of ordered rule or the new methods by which society is governed”.<sup>21</sup> The chief protagonists of multilevel governance agree that government is different from the concept of governance which indicates the formal institutions of the state and the use of monopoly legitimate coercive power at the nation-state level to maintain public order and facilitate collective actions. In this regard, according to James Rosenau, the difference between governance and government has to be recognised to get a grip on the emerging demands for governance. However, both the government and governance are exercising rule systems but the process of exercising such rule system is different. In fact, from the government perspective, rules systems encompass formal structures or institutions as for example sovereignty, constitutional legitimacy and laws. In contrast to that governance comprises of both formal and informal rules including traditional norms and habits, informal agreements, shared premises, successful negotiations, community participations and public-private partnerships that are carried out by public or private actors.<sup>22</sup> Therefore multilevel governance:

- refers to a set of institutions and actors that are drawn from but also beyond government;
- identifies the blurring of boundaries and responsibilities for tackling social and economic issues and also identifies the power dependencies involved in the relationships between institutions engaged in collective actions;
- also refers to autonomous self-governing networks of actors; and
- recognises the capacity to get things done which does not rest solely on the power of the government to command or use its authority.

In this context, multilevel governance refers to a system of continuous negotiation and decisional relocations among different institutions at the national, regional and local levels. In this system national, regional and local level governments are integrated into overarching public policy

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<sup>21</sup> R A W Rhodes, “The New Governance: Governing without Government”, *Political Studies*, Vol. 44, No. 4, 1996, p. 652.

<sup>22</sup> J N Rosenau, “Strong Demand, Huge Supply: Governance in an Emerging Epoch”, in Ian Bache and Mathew Flinders (eds.), *Multilevel Governance*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 31.

networks.<sup>23</sup> This public policy network in contrast to traditional policy network recognises different clusters of actors each of whom has interests or stakes in a given policy sector. These actors help to determine policy successes and sustainability at the local levels.

Multilevel governance has two dimensions of public policy formulations and implementations – vertical and horizontal. The vertical dimension of multilevel governance refers to the increased interdependence of government’s institutions operating at different territorial levels, while the horizontal dimension focuses on the growing interdependence between government and people at various territorial levels. Therefore, authority has been the subject for relocation from state level institutions to institutions at the regional, local and community level, and also among formal as well as informal level. The following table shows the differences between State-centric and multilevel system of governance.

**Table 1: State-Centric Governance vs. Multilevel Governance**

<b>Governance Aspects</b>	<b>State-Centric Governance</b>	<b>Multilevel Governance</b>
Actor(s) of Governance	State is the most important, rational and self-interested actor which plays dominant roles in the governance process.	State is not the only dominant actor; rather State shares control and decision- making competences with different actors at different levels of governance.
Exercising authority and power	State’s role is defined by the concept of state-autonomy or state-sovereignty and only state determines authority and power.	Increasing demand for re-allocation of authority and power.
Decision-making process	The State is the most influencing actor in the decision-making process. On crucial issues decision-making is based on unanimity.	Multilevel governance promotes negotiations among governments and non-state actors at several territorial ties (supranational, national, sub-national and local).

<sup>23</sup> G Marks and L Hooghe, “Contrasting Visions of Multilevel Governance”, in *ibid.*, p. 15.

*Source:* Compiled from different sources by the author.

The concept of multilevel governance thus refers to the changing relationships between actors situated at different territorial levels both in the public and private sectors in terms of public policy formulations and implementations. Therefore, the relevance of multilevel governance for effective social protection measures can be argued as are manifold.

Because there has been mounting demand for social protection in the developing countries to address hunger, to respond to sudden crises or to overcome chronic poverty, social protection policies are adopted and implemented by the governments to enhance the capacity of the poor and vulnerable persons. These interventions are essential to improve the livelihoods of target population by reducing the impacts of various risks and shocks that adversely affect income levels and opportunities to acquire basic needs. Traditionally, social protection is largely about public actions implemented by a range of public institutions and programmes aimed at protecting individuals and their households from poverty and deprivation. However, social protections tend to redistribute resources toward disadvantaged groups, but such measures have not often been translated into an effective and sustainable action due to the failure of the traditional social protection institutions to effectively reach and engage the poor and vulnerable people.<sup>24</sup>

This state of affairs has led to the introduction of multilevel governance with new decentralised social protection mechanism. This mechanism involves engaging more actively both the formal and informal institutions, engaging the poor and their communities in the policy designing, implementation and monitoring. Multilevel governance thus decentralises the delivery processes of public services to local and community governance structures, introduces demand-driven programme supports and, community involvement in targeting and managing social safety net supports as well as fosters group-based economic activities and resource managements. The rationales behind the introduction of multilevel governance in social protection measures are that locally formulated definition of deprivations are more consistent with local conditions and culture than rigid, technical formulas coordinated by

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<sup>24</sup> Jonathan Conning and Michael Kevane, "Community-Based Targeting Mechanisms for Social Safety Nets: A Critical Review", *World Development*, Vol. 30, No. 3, March 2002, p. 1.

hierarchical national authorities. The traditional institutions that have responsibilities for these programmes like social sector ministries are often weak in the local areas, and the targeted poor people have no voice and participation in these government institutions. A study shows that social programmes that involve communities, local groups, local governments and non-governmental organisations can achieve better outcomes.<sup>25</sup> Multilevel governance in social programme not only harnesses but also strengthens potential social capital and community organisations. This is very important for the poorest and disadvantaged groups who can be empowered through the creation of a sense of ownership thereby enabling them more to articulate their demands and press for it. In the context of Bangladesh, the introduction of multilevel governance is very important. The country has made impressive gains in poverty reduction and, social and human development, but these achievements are increasingly being overshadowed by rising concerns about efficiency and sustainability of social protection measures. In this regard, the next section delineates the overall social protection measures in Bangladesh.

### **3. Social Safety Net Measures in Bangladesh**

Initiatives for social safety nets are becoming increasingly important for countries like Bangladesh where a large number of people are living in abject poverty and are also excluded from formal job market. Social safety net programmes aim to provide social protection to people who are experiencing various types of economic and social hardships. Bangladesh has a set of actions – public or private – which addresses risk, vulnerability and chronic poverty. Social protections aim to prevent adverse events, mitigate their impacts, or enhance the capacity of the poor people to cope with the adverse situation. Moreover, social safety net is also an important component of Bangladesh's poverty reduction strategy. The aims of SSNPs in Bangladesh are:

- Provide food and other emergency assistances to the victims of natural disasters and calamities so that they can improve their poverty condition;
- Develop women's skills through training, motivating savings, providing access to credits so that they can enter into income generating sectors and empower themselves;

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<sup>25</sup> Jeanine Braithwaite et. al., *Safety Net Programs and Poverty Reduction: Lessons from Cross-Country Experience*, Washington, DC: World Bank, 1997, p. 87.

- Provide livelihood support and subsistence allowance so that distressed women, elderly and disabled people can minimise their daily hardships;
- Support the comparatively backward region of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), develop infrastructure for addressing the needs of the inhabitants of CHT, and equip them with necessary skills which allow them entry into the mainstream society; and
- Generate employment during slack seasons so that people in extreme poverty have employment thereby sustaining their purchasing power.

However, the major SSNPs in Bangladesh can be divided into four categories.<sup>26</sup> These are:

- a. Provision of special allowances for the various underprivileged sections of the population, so that the poor and disadvantaged people can cope with their poverty situation more effectively;
- b. Provisions of employment generation through micro-credit and different fund management programmes;
- c. Food security based activities to better manage the consequences of natural disasters; and
- d. Provision of education, health, and training to make new generation more capable and self-reliant.

SSNPs in Bangladesh cover three different groups who experience different facets of shocks and risks associated with vulnerabilities and poverty. First of all, SSNPs target people who are labelled as chronic poor i.e., those who are poor even during the normal situation as they have limited access to assets and income to manage risks and vulnerabilities. As for example Vulnerable Group Development (VGD) Programme targets ultra-poor rural women who are vulnerable to chronic poverty. It is a food-based transfer with a complementary development package (training, savings, credit etc.). Each participant receives either 30kg of wheat or 25kg of micronutrient-fortified *atta* (wheat flour) each month for 24 months. The government of Bangladesh, different donors and Non-governmental Organisations (NGOs) also run Food for Work programme and Vulnerable Group Feeding (VGF) Programme. Food for Work offers employment generation for the poor mainly during the dry season through

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<sup>26</sup> Barkat Khuda, "Social Safety Net Programmes in Bangladesh: A Review", *Bangladesh Development Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 2, June 2011, p. 91.

their employment in the infrastructure construction and maintenance projects while VGF provides food aid over several months to poor households. It is used purely as an emergency programme at the time of disasters.

The second group of people are those who live close to the poverty line therefore, can easily fall into a chronic poverty situation during economic, social, and environmental crises and hardships. To address these people, the country runs several SSNPs. Among them, Programme Initiative for *Monga*<sup>27</sup> Eradication (PRIME) has been launched in 2006. The programme benefits the poorest households through provision of 'seed money' and linking them to 'protection nets' whenever possible. It provides cash-for-work employment opportunities for one *monga* season, emergency credit for households to slightly increase their income, consumption loans, remittance services and specially designed flexible credit support throughout the year. The prevention aspect of the SSNPs aim to break vicious cycles that trap households during shocks and stresses – preventing, for example, sales of productive assets following a drought or flood or to pay for major family events. Besides, in September 2008, 100- Day Employment Generation Programme was initiated in response to soaring food prices. The beneficiaries under this 100-Day programme receive Tk. 100 a day for work. Registered unemployed people have been issued cards after enlisting. If the registered unemployed are not given an appropriate job within 15 days after issuance of cards, they should get unemployment allowance which is Tk. 40 per day for the first 30 days and Tk. 50 thereafter. The programme's intended focus is on eradicating unemployment and poverty, and ensuring food security.

The third group of people are those who are generally unstable and vulnerable such as the disabled, divorced, and widowed persons. In Bangladesh, the government provides monthly stipends in varying amounts to the disabled and old persons, as well as divorced women.<sup>28</sup> These groups of people have no access to regular employment or any help from other sources. Moreover, SSNPs<sup>29</sup> for these groups of people also adopt both promotion and protection approaches. SSNPs in Bangladesh

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<sup>27</sup> It's a seasonal hunger phenomenon in the north-western part of Bangladesh.

<sup>28</sup> Old persons and widowed women get allowances Tk. 165 per month.

<sup>29</sup> Such as Old Age Allowances and Allowances to the Widowed, Deserted, and Destitute Women.



therefore, intend to raise the incomes and employment opportunities of the poor and also include measures to reduce their vulnerabilities.

All the succeeding governments in Bangladesh have been giving high priority to SSNPs to deal with risks, poverty and vulnerability of the people. These programmes intend to redistribute the benefits of economic growth. In times of crisis, shock and distress, these programmes act as social, health, and economic stabilizers to reduce potential social and economic fallout of the crisis. Bangladesh through SSNPs therefore, emphasises equity and poverty reduction for promoting equitable growth and development.

However, in some aspects social protection measures lack responsiveness, efficiency, proper targeting approach therefore, lack sustainability. These governance deficits affect social safety net management system to dispense benefits to the poor and vulnerable people. In this context, there has been increasing demands for adopting multilevel governance process in the social safety net programmes in Bangladesh. Multilevel governance can develop a system and process whereby a condition can be created to expand and accommodate the poorer and vulnerable people of the society to engage in policy formulations and implementations. Multilevel governance can ensure focus on the support system that creates employment for the poor and enhances their livelihood through continuous extension of services and supports. Multilevel governance is also required for achieving human rights and basic needs, and removing constraints for the poor people in their participation in the policy formulation process as well as its implementation. The following section therefore, focuses on the key areas in social protection measures where multilevel governance process needs to be incorporated and implemented.

#### **4. Necessity of Multilevel Governance for Efficient Social Protection Measures in Bangladesh**

With a poverty figure of nearly 56 million and a food insecure population of almost 65 million, SSNPs draw greater importance in the Bangladesh Government's agenda to address vulnerabilities of the poor people. SSNPs are designed to help and transfer resources to the poor and vulnerable groups of different parts of the society for poverty reduction, social empowerment, and employment generation. Currently, the Government has good numbers of SSNPs which include direct transfers to the poor, whether in cash or in kind and with or without a work

requirement. Among the 30 programmes, there are 4 unconditional and 3 conditional food transfers. The unconditional food-based programmes are: the VGD, VGF, Gratuitous Relief (GR) and Community Nutrition Programme. VGF and GR are generally used in times of natural disasters or seasonal downturns, whereas VGD and Community Nutrition Programme are ongoing programmes. The conditional food based programmes are Food-for-Work (FFW), Test Relief (TR) and Food Support for the Chittagong Hill Tracts.<sup>30</sup> Since the food-based programmes are the largest programmes among all the SSNPs, and are distributed from the Public Food Distribution System (PFDS), an analysis of the food-based programmes' budget allocation, administration and performance will unfold the necessity of multilevel governance for overall SSNPs' management in Bangladesh.

Since the independence of Bangladesh, all the successive governments have tried to ensure effective delivery of the social safety net supports to the poor and vulnerable people. However, for effective social protection measures for the poor people in Bangladesh, any effort must fulfil four things. First, the social safety net needs to be focused on geographically located poverty pocket areas such as the *Monga* prone areas of the north-western part of Bangladesh. Poverty pockets also include the people living in the *Haor*, *Char* (island) and coastal-belt regions of the country. Second, social safety net should address the large number of unemployed and informal workers both in the urban and the rural areas as well as should include measures to integrate them with the formal income generating activities. Third, social safety net should be sustainable i.e., they should also help to elevate the conditions of the poor as well as protect them from not being falling again below the poverty line. And finally, efficient implementations of the SSNPs should include an integrated and comprehensive framework.

In Bangladesh, the overall impacts of social safety net programmes still remains relatively low as the real impacts of the transfer or allocation of funds are difficult to reach the real target people. The extensity of coverage and qualities of these SSNPs are questionable. According to a World Bank study, "even if the interventions were perfectly targeted, that would still mean that less than 10 per cent of the poor receives benefits due to miss-targeting and leakages, only about 6-7 per cent of the poor are actually covered."<sup>31</sup> Although the

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<sup>30</sup> Shaikh S Ahmed, *Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The World Bank, 2007. Available online at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BANGLADESHEXTN/Resources/295759-1240185591585/BangladeshSocialSafetyNets.pdf>, accessed 14 December 2011.

<sup>31</sup> The World Bank, "Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: An Assessment", *Policy Note. No. 33411*, Dhaka: The World Bank, 14 September 2005, p. 18.

government has plethora of social protection promises, they have not reached to the target people properly. Therefore, some overall governance challenges remain there for their effective implementations.

On the other hand, multilevel governance in the context of social safety net measures in Bangladesh can also be viewed as a cross-cutting issue to address the processes and impacts of SSNPs. In Bangladesh, there are three key major areas in the management of SSNPs wherein lack of multilevel governance results in the deprivation of the poor, women, and the vulnerable people from the social protection measures of the country. These are discussed in the following subsections.

#### **4.1 Centralised Administration of SSNPs**

The administration of social safety net programmes has come under scrutiny to assess their efficient implementations in Bangladesh. From the administrative point of view, these programmes are becoming more and more centralised and hierarchical. The government currently runs a total of 84 programmes under the SSNPs.<sup>32</sup> Thirteen ministries and various international donor agencies are involved in implementing these SSNPs. The numbers of agencies both national and international involved in providing social protection are testimony to the heightened importance of this sector. But sometime this may also cause a hurdle when there is a need to coordinate and navigate through many different agencies to achieve an objective or to accomplish a task. As a result several coordination problems are usually associated with the SSNPs in Bangladesh. These are:

- Problems arising out of existence of multiplicity in planning as well as in executing the programmes. Overlapping of implementing agencies has become a regular phenomenon. This large mechanism has also increased implementation costs.
- Lack of ownership and effective mechanism to ensure accountability and transparency.
- Absence of single policy-making authority for SSNPs.
- Presence of large number of intermediaries in the distribution system of the programmes which reduces efficiency and increases chances of leakages.
- The weaknesses of the local government institutions especially the *Union Parishads* (Union Councils) primarily responsible for

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<sup>32</sup> “Social safety net shrinks: 40 lakh beneficiaries dropped”, *The Daily Star*, 10 June, 2011.

implementation of the programmes have also been identified as a major cause for concern.<sup>33</sup>

Almost everything related to SSNPs are designed by the central government and there is virtually no coordination with the local governments in relation to decision-making in these processes. Apart from this problem, government has made small allocation for SSNPs in the national budget as for example in FY 2011-12, the total allocation for SSNPs is Tk. 22,556.05 crore which is about 13.79 per cent of the total budget and only 2.51 per cent of GDP. In Bangladesh, the allowances or the benefits the poor receive are inadequate to their needs. Except VGD Programme, food supports are provided for a short period in response to seasonal or emergency needs. Although most programmes are based on some well defined criteria, very few programmes have a strategy for graduating the beneficiaries.<sup>34</sup>

#### **4.2 'Targeting Inefficiencies' of the SSNPs**

In SSNPs targeting method refers to the set of rules, selection criteria, certain benchmarks and other elements of programme design that define beneficiary eligibility. Targeting mechanism also includes very important elements of programme design i.e., intermediary agents and organisational design. This aspect allows for the possibility that different intermediary agents across the different levels of programme using the same targeting methods could obtain better results. Multilevel governance in targeting methods refers to the inclusion of local and community based institutions/agents in the mechanism. These local and community based agents assess eligibility and provide assistance in implementing delivery services. Their roles are valuable and crucial for determining actual beneficiaries and assessing their needs thereby helping the targeting mechanism to achieve the target outcomes.

For long, Bangladesh has been channelling large amount of resources for distributing food and cash aid through various SSNPs. In the early nineties, the country has shifted from a distribution system largely based

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<sup>33</sup> PPRC-UNDP, *Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh: Review of Issues and Analytical Inventory*, Vol. 1, Dhaka: UNDP Bangladesh, and Power and Participatory Research Centre (PPRC), April 2011, p. 33.

<sup>34</sup> Shaikh Shamsuddin Ahmed *et.al.*, *Are the Poor Protected? Vulnerability and the Role of Safety Net in the Breaking Down Poverty in Bangladesh*, Dhaka: University Press Limited, 2009, p. 275.

on a rural ration programmes to a system based on targeted programmes for the poor. An important issue with regard to coverage of SSNPs is whether poor people are effectively targeted by these programmes. Shifting of distribution system alone however reflect little about the programme's reach to the neediest populations. Moreover, the absence of multilevel governance creates scope for inefficiency in targeting mechanisms as they fail to address regional and seasonal needs, and selection of deserving poor and vulnerable people. These are further discussed below.

#### ***4.2.1 Ignoring Regional and Seasonal Vulnerabilities***

Lack of multilevel governance process led to the negligence in acknowledging the variations of poverty scenarios across different divisions in Bangladesh. For example, according to a study,<sup>35</sup> improvements in the poverty situation due to SSNP's were most prominent for Sylhet. Though Sylhet had the highest share of beneficiary households and participation, Khulna deserved the highest allocation due to the poverty incidence. In 2005, Sylhet received the largest share of benefits - 24.31 per cent for rural beneficiaries and 11.25 per cent for urban beneficiaries. In contrast, Khulna received the lowest - 11.03 and 4.23 per cents respectively for rural and urban households. The VGF had the highest number of beneficiaries, at around 33.34 per cent of the total. Sylhet had the largest number of VGF beneficiaries. Similar trend is evident in the VGD program which provided assistance to 17.11 per cent households, with Dhaka having the most VGD beneficiaries.<sup>36</sup> Most of these programmes are jointly funded by the Government and the donors. However, while donors have interests in targeting based on food insecurity and vulnerability maps, the Government's resources at times target less food-insecure areas – a reflection of its own political agenda and need to cater to the local political actors.

Due to the absence of multilevel governance, the targeting mechanism also does not take into account the geographical variations in poverty and vulnerability across different regions in Bangladesh. Rural and urban differences in safety net coverage now a day are important debatable issues as most of the SSNPs have high coverage in rural areas. Focus on rural needs is justifiable as most of the poor people in Bangladesh live in

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<sup>35</sup> Shaikh S Ahmed, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-8.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

rural areas. But recently with the rapid growth of urbanisation, poor people have been forced to migrate in the urban areas and been compelled to live below the poverty line. It is estimated that 43 per cent of urban households live below the poverty line among which 23 per cent are considered extreme poor. Around 35 per cent of the population of six major cities live in slums which cover only 4 per cent of their land area with limited or no access to services.<sup>37</sup> The urban poor are forced to work for nominal wages and have less access to formal job sectors. Limited income does not meet their food needs and basic survival in the face of soaring food prices and increasing living costs in urban areas. The increasing rate of urban poverty requires enhanced SSNPs intervention to assist the urban poor.<sup>38</sup>

In recent years, SSNPs have given attention to the problems of specific vulnerabilities in a given geographic location in Bangladesh especially in the *Monga* prone areas in the North-west part of the country. However, there is an acute realisation that location and season specific attention may also be needed in other areas as well. The coastal areas of Southern Bangladesh is exposed to ever increasing challenges due to climate change with ensuing sea level rise, salinity intrusions, water logging, erosions, and increased frequency of natural disasters. The same realities exist in *char* areas. The main natural and physical barriers for the *char* lands are that they are remote area because of their distant location to the mainland, and repeatedly hit by floods which limit the work opportunities for the *char* dwellers. People living in distant *char* land also endure very insecure livelihoods due to river erosions that cause great vulnerability in terms of loss of cultivable land, homestead and assets, and disrupting roads and communication networks as well as interrupting the marketing of agricultural products. Moreover, the poverty situations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) areas are quite different from other plain land areas in Bangladesh. The causes of poverty and vulnerability are deep rooted in the history of CHT. Economic inequality accompanied with differences in ethnicity, language and culture aggravated the overall poverty situation of the people in the CHT. All of these issues of vulnerabilities and poverty in different areas should be addressed in the

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<sup>37</sup> Urban Health Update, *Bangladesh, Urban Poverty, Climate Change and Built Environment*, 2008, available online at <http://urbanhealthupdates.wordpress.com>, accessed on 12 January 2012.

<sup>38</sup> Fahmida Khatun, et.al., *National Budget Analysis for the Ultra Poor*, Dhaka: CPD-BRAC, 2011, p. 2

SSNPs' coverage mechanism. Another problem with targeting is that SSNPs do not consider local realities and cropping patterns during delivery of services. The newly adopted Employment Generation Programme (EGP) operates in two lean seasons of the year to assist the rural ultra poor most of whom are agricultural day labourers at times when they have no access to income generating activities. In reality, as crop cycles vary with different agro-ecoregions, lean periods do not prevail uniformly across the country.

In this backdrop, rather than following a hierarchical top-down methods of targeting, the SSNPs design should consider involving the local and community agents to collect information from the cluster-wise areas of poverty, who will also pay due attention to the issues of socio-political forces, geographical barriers, cropping patterns, and natural disasters as well as suggest appropriate time-frame for interventions. In view of this, a bottom up method of decision-making is required for targeting mechanism, and intervention mechanism needs to be designed by the local agents and community people as well.

#### ***4.2.2 Selection of Beneficiary***

SSNPs in Bangladesh adopt different criteria for selecting beneficiaries. According to the table presented below, though the objectives of some SSNPs i.e. VGD, VGF and Food for Work are same, they use different criteria.

**Table: 2: Beneficiary Selection Criteria**

<b>Name of the Program</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Targeting Criteria</b>
VGF	To provide food and other emergency assistance to disaster victims.	Disaster and calamity victims.
VGD	1. Developing life skills for women through training, motivating savings and providing scope for availing credits. 2. Building social awareness on disaster management and nutrition through group-training.	1. Households with not more than 15 acres of land. 2. Households with income less than Tk. 300 and dependent upon seasonal wage employment. 3. Women of reproductive age (18-49). 4. Day labour or temporary worker. 5. Households with little or no productive assets.

FFW and Cash for Works	1. Employment generation for the poor in slack season. 2. To develop and maintain rural infrastructure.	1. People who are functionally landless. 2. People who lack productive resources.
TR (Rural Maintenance Program)	1. Employment generation for the poverty stricken people in the rainy season. 2. To develop and maintain rural infrastructure.	Generally a location is targeted where poverty is relatively severe.
Old Age Allowance	To provide livelihood support to the elderly poor people.	1. At least 65 years of age. 2. Income equal to Tk. 2000. 3. Must not have worked in formal sector. 4. Number of beneficiaries is determined on the basis of the category of the Union. 5. 50 per cent of the beneficiaries are women.

*Source:* Shaikh S Ahmed, *Social Safety Nets in Bangladesh*. Dhaka: The World Bank, 2007. Available online at <http://siteresources.worldbank.org/BANGLADESHEXTN/Resources/295759-1240185591585/BangladeshSocialSafetyNets.pdf>, accessed 14 December 2011. p. 9.

In most cases, guidelines for targeting are prepared by the responsible administrative ministry assigned to implement the programme. They set selection criteria at the household level, the total number of beneficiaries, and the number of beneficiaries per Union. Some programmes such as VGD, VGF and Old Age allowance according to the table target similar low income groups but use different criteria to identify beneficiaries. Sometimes all the indicators designed to select beneficiaries are difficult to follow and verify. For instances, first, it is difficult to verify income and, identify the household which consumes less than two full meals a day. Second, there is considerable vagueness about the targeting criteria which uses land possession as a way of differentiating between the poor and non-poor. These criteria could lead to significant misallocation of resources. Currently people who own at most 5 decimals of land are classified as very poor. However given the fact that 59 per cent of the poor have less than 5 decimals of land, as do 36 per cent of the non-poor, a random selection of households based on land possession could lead to selecting over one-third of the non-poor. Thus there remains the possibility of government's scarce resources being diverted to the non-poor, a sign of the inadequacy of the coverage of SSNPs. A recent study shows that in many programmes, poor people do not have access to programme benefits whereas non-poor become beneficiaries through errors of inclusion which



are as high as 20 per cent.<sup>39</sup> And third, the age of the beneficiaries remain to be a controversial issue. Although government recognises the need for older women to receive assistance, the guidelines of the VGD and FFW programmes do not encourage their selection as in most cases they are not able to participate in the training programme.

The above discussion shows that absence of multilevel governance causes ineffective targeting mechanism. It also creates space for intermediaries viz., patron clientele, local leaders etc., in the SSNPs. The lack of local and community level selection and monitoring mechanism increases leakages in the programmes by degrading quantity as well as quality of supports, which are discussed in the following section.

### **4.3 Lack of Effectiveness and Sustainability of SSNPs**

Studies point to leakages of the magnitude of 10-50 per cent for food-based programmes and 5-25 per cent for cash-based programmes. These studies show a strong correlation between the number of intermediaries in the transfer process of a programme and the degree of leakage in the programme.<sup>40</sup> A recent FAO report estimated that 11-12 per cent of the funds of the social protection programmes are drained out through several channels. One per cent of the benefit is leaked out as bribe, 7 per cent lost through mal-targeting and 3-4 per cent for receiving less than the prescribed amount. Having close relationships with local representatives, giving bribes and belonging to the vote bank of an influential member or chairmen appeared to be very important qualifications for receiving benefits of the social protection programmes. Around 14.5 per cent of the beneficiaries used the channel of giving bribes of which two-thirds managed access to the programmes, while one-fifth received benefits through social connections. Only one-third of the beneficiaries were selected purely on the basis of poverty. Overall, however, the study found that local governments were managing the programmes quite well with limited overlapping, low degree of leakage and misuse of funds.<sup>41</sup> Nevertheless, since there is no unanimous agreement on the acceptable level of leakage, it is difficult to accurately judge the situation.

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<sup>39</sup> Iffat A Sharif, *Building a Targeting System for Bangladesh based on Proxy Means Testing*, Dhaka: World Bank, 2009.

<sup>40</sup> S S Ahmed, *op. cit.*

<sup>41</sup> “12 pc Social Safety Net Lost on bribe, flaws”, *The Daily Star*, 09 February 2009.

Moreover at present the major discussion on social safety net focuses on sustainability. One of the main objectives of these programmes is to concentrate on the efficient management of resources mainly for the poor and vulnerable so that they are able to sustain certain living standards and do not fall into the trap of poverty in future. Sustainable social safety net requires comprehensive programmes in order to:

- Ensure employment generating activities for reducing the vulnerability of low-income households with regard to basic consumption and access to basic services;
- Enhance long term income generating activities through training; and
- Ensuring equity and empowerment of the poor people with regard to access to resources and decision-making process.

In Bangladesh, these sustainability issues of social safety net remains a major challenge. The SSNPs have low impacts on the income generating activities as they cover only a fraction of the poor. Most safety net programmes in Bangladesh pay little attention to demographic vulnerability in terms of the poor's limited access to income generating activities. As for example these programmes pay little attention to demographically vulnerable people including children, the elderly and those who are severely disabled or chronically ill therefore, are often not able to perform the intense physical labour involved in cash or food-based public works programmes.

The country faces resource constraints hence its ability to undertake safety net on a large scale is limited. Moreover, resources are not allocated on the basis of local realities and necessities. Clearly, most of the resources are allocated to the rural people as relief or aid, not for providing training or assets for livelihood supports. For instance, the country focuses more on VGF for resource allocation rather than VGD. In fiscal year 2011, the VGF received Tk. 1,536 crore and VGD received only Tk. 638 crore for programme implementation. VGF is a relief supports for emergency purposes. Therefore continuing pouring of VGF resources in the hands of poor can make them too dependent on free meals. They should be provided with long term, locally oriented income generating trainings so that they can be self-dependent rather than relying on others' help. The existing VGD programme is providing food and training for the selected poor households. It provides training for life-skills and capacity-building needed to undertake income generating activities. Generally, this programme is designed to provide food grains and training to the

vulnerable people, mostly women, for a certain period, after which those women will utilise their training to start their own venture. But in reality very few entrepreneurial activities are taking place for lack of capital and access of the women to income generating activities. Therefore, few initiatives need to be undertaken to incorporate multilevel governance practices in the overall management of SSNPs in Bangladesh to ensure their effectiveness.

## **5. Few Recommendations**

If social safety net is to be made effective and sustainable, it is necessary that the vulnerable and poor's voice and participation are properly heard and considered. People should be considered as agent of change rather than passive recipients. Multilevel governance approach can ensure people's participation as agent of change in the SSNPs. Following are some of the recommendations that can be adopted at various levels to create a condition of multilevel governance for pro-poor SSNPs.

### **5.1 Decentralising the Authority**

First and foremost multilevel governance approach to address poverty must opt for comprehensive decentralisation of the authority. Local government and locally elected bodies should be given the core responsibilities to design proper development initiatives and appropriate strategies to address poverty challenges. Decentralised authority plays the interfacing role between the democracy and development. Decentralisation of authority can create the institutional mechanism for ensuring participation of the various socially and economically excluded groups of the rural community. Local level governance can place emphasis on the pro-poor focus and stresses on participatory social delivery services involving wider rural communities i.e., farmers, landless households, different occupational and ethnic groups, and women. It can also play an important interfacing role in rural economic development through mobilization of the rural human capital especially in areas like fisheries, social forestry, small-scale water development and micro-credit. It can also directly assist in designing and managing SSNPs and also scaling them up through introducing new entrepreneurs and monitoring tomorrow's poor. Multilevel governance at the local level can also address immediate income/consumption poverty issues. Regular and top-down service delivery system mainly focuses on supply side and thus cannot directly tackle demand-side issues. Multilevel governance can reduce the

administrative and management costs associated with the implementation of safety net programmes. Delivering safety net services through local and community organisations eludes the need to establish new institutional or organisational structures, thereby enables social protection to be built upon existing processes and procedures.

### **5.2 Local Level Planning and Resource Allocation Process**

In general, social safety net planning and resource allocation in Bangladesh is top down and lacks transparency in which decisions are skewed in favour of those who directly or indirectly exercise power. Therefore it requires full participations of the programme beneficiaries at the local level for proper planning and efficient implementation. This approach fosters openness, sharing of ideas and generates debate among competing alternatives and opportunities. This will prevent arbitrary decisions which are biased against the poor. To this end, existing people's organisations at the community level should be strengthened and a sense of ownership needs to be imparted so that they can participate in the programme planning and implementation process. Systematic education and information about rights and duties will also enhance their ability to make appropriate claims as well as will enable them to perform a supervisory function over the programme to prevent selection errors and leakages. Multilevel governance thus rests on the condition where a mechanism needs to be developed for assured participations of the poor and the disadvantaged groups in the local level planning.

### **5.3 Ensure People-oriented Public Delivery System**

People oriented public delivery system requires local level needs assessment initiatives to target actual beneficiaries. People's participation in the delivery system ensures coverage and improvements in the quality of resource distributions. Local information and knowledge on people's livelihoods, resources, and rights are critical for designing and strengthening the delivery system. This system also ensures investment in human capital thereby enabling greater participation of the people by empowering them through mobilizing their talents in community development projects.

## **6. Conclusion**

This paper argues that there are good grounds to explore the relationships between SSNPs and the use of multilevel governance system in Bangladesh. Traditional governance approaches suffer from inefficiency

and specificity and thus generate a good deal of debate regarding the sustainability and impacts of SSNPs in Bangladesh. The discussion put forward in this paper argues that there are some functions associated with the proper delivery of social safety net programmes for which a multilevel governance approach is best suited. The needs and aspirations of the poor can be addressed through an understanding of the multilevel governance approach in Bangladesh as well as redesigning the whole management system of the SSNPs under the multilevel governance framework. From this perspective, well-designed and well-targeted SSNPs through the application of the principles of multilevel governance can be fiscally cost-effective while it will also protect and, at the same time, help the poor to get out of the poverty.

*A K M Nazrul Islam*

## **WATER SECURITY CONUNDRUM IN BANGLADESH**

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### **Abstract**

At the global level, use of water has increased significantly and it is on the rise, while its availability and access have reduced. Water is inherently linked to the growing challenges of the present day civilisation that include food security, health, economic growth, and poverty alleviation. In Bangladesh, availability of and access to water have appeared to be a significant obstruction to the survival and livelihood of its people and, sustainable economic growth of the country. Being the lowest riparian country in the Eastern Himalayan River systems, the water ecosystem of Bangladesh is vulnerable to unilateral upstream actions since a major share of surface water in the country comes from outside the border. This paper highlights that the main reason of Bangladesh water crises is the low flows of water due to upstream intervention by India which significantly affects surface water availability in Bangladesh during the dry period. Thus, during the dry period there always remains a gap between the need and availability. There is an increasing dependence on the use of groundwater which is depleting very fast due to over exploitation by a huge population. Climate change is likely to worsen the situation further. Due to severe gaps between the demand and supply of water there is a distressing impact on the live and livelihood of the population of Bangladesh which are manifested on the environment/non-traditional security sphere of the country. These, in course of time are likely to be posing severe threat to the security and stability of the country. The paper concludes that the management of common water resources taking into account the totality of Bangladesh-India common rivers could hardly be achieved without the involvement of all other stake holders which may include the Eastern Himalayan River systems co-basin states, particularly Nepal and Bhutan.

### **1. Introduction**

Water security is an emerging concept. As a security concern, water is beginning to gain attention worldwide. This is due to the fact that water is an indispensable constituent of life supporting systems and it also has a major role

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in poverty alleviation and local food security.<sup>42</sup> In recent days, use of water has significantly increased all over the world and it is on the rise. On the other hand, availability of and access to water have reduced. The absence or shortage of water can seriously disrupt the very survival of any living being. The situation of demand and supply of water depicts a crisis today and portrays an apprehension for the days to come. Water security involves the sustainable use and protection of water systems, the protection against water related hazards (floods and droughts), the sustainable development of water resources and the safeguarding of (access to) water functions and services for humans and the environment<sup>43</sup>. Water is inherently linked to the growing challenges of the present day civilisation, including food security, health, economic growth, and poverty alleviation. Population increase and economic growth have impelled higher demands for the water resources available and the countries are having an increasingly difficult time in managing, allocating and protecting the water that exists. In a country like Bangladesh, declining availability of and access to water are significant obstruction to the survival and livelihood of its people and sustainable economic growth of the country. Climate change is likely to worsen the situation further. According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, by 2050, more than one billion people in Asia alone are projected to experience negative impacts on water resources as a result of climate change.<sup>44</sup> Experts project that reduced access to fresh water will lead to a range of consequences, including impaired food production, loss of livelihood security, large-scale migration within and across borders, and increased geopolitical tensions and instabilities.<sup>45</sup>

Bangladesh is one of the most populous country of the world with relatively small land mass of 147,570 square kilometres (km) and a huge population of 160

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<sup>42</sup> “New Dimensions in Water Security: Water, Society and Ecosystem Services in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, Rome, 2000, available at <ftp://ftp.fao.org/agl/aglw/docs/misc25.pdf> accessed on 12 December 2011.

<sup>43</sup> Bart Schultz and Stefan Uhlenbrook, *‘Water Security’: What Does it Mean, What May it Imply?*, Discussion Draft Paper for the session on Water Security, 13 June 2007, Delft, The Netherlands.

<sup>44</sup> “Asia’s Next Challenge: Securing the Region’s Water Future”, available at [http://asiasociety.org/files/pdf/Water\\_SecurityReport.pdf](http://asiasociety.org/files/pdf/Water_SecurityReport.pdf) accessed on 20 December 2011.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

million.<sup>46</sup> With over 1,084 people per square km, it is the most densely populated country in the world, barring a few city states. Bangladesh's steady economic growth over the years has created many environmental challenges, particularly in urban and industrialized areas. While security of water in Bangladesh is threatened mostly by current land-use developments and over-utilization of groundwater, the growing industrialization process is compounding the situation further as it increases water demands, pollution and unsustainable use of natural resources, including groundwater and surface water bodies. The unpredictable contingencies, such as drought, floods, earthquakes etc. can also affect water security in a negative and dangerous way. Furthermore, the water ecosystem of Bangladesh is vulnerable to unilateral upstream actions since a major share of surface water in the country comes from outside the border. It is a matter of concern that due to lack of trust and non-transparency between the two Eastern Himalayan River basin countries i.e., Bangladesh and India, there exists no formal water sharing arrangement except the water-sharing agreement of the river Ganges signed in 1996. Under the circumstances, as a lower riparian country Bangladesh is likely to face severe water crisis in the coming days due to random contamination of surface and ground water, absence of comprehensive water sharing arrangement with neighbouring countries, and lack of comprehensive water management system.<sup>47</sup> This paper will premise the water situation of Bangladesh and make an effort to identify the sources of water, the gap between the supply and demand of water, effects due to the rising gap between demand and supply and, their security implications. The paper will also touch upon the management aspect including trans-national cooperation.

## 2. Sources of Water in Bangladesh

Bangladesh is the lowest riparian in the Eastern Himalayan River systems – the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna commonly known as the GBM. The Brahmaputra and the Ganges enter Bangladesh from the north and west and, flows south and east-southeast respectively to their confluence at Aricha, about 70 km west of Dhaka in central Bangladesh; and then flows south as the Padma River for about a further 100 km to its confluence with the Meghna River at

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<sup>46</sup>The World Bank, available at <http://web.worldbank.org/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/DATASTATISTICS/0,,content MDK:20535285~menuPK: 1192694~pagePK: 64133150~piPK:64133175~theSitePK:239419,00.html> accessed on 30 March 2010.

<sup>47</sup> Md. Shariful Islam, "Water Scarcity and Conflict: A Bangladesh perspective", available at <http://www.thedailystar.net/forum/2011/june/water.htm> accessed on 20 December 2011.



Chandpur. The Meghna River flows southwest, draining eastern Bangladesh and the bordering north-eastern states of India to join the Padma River at Chandpur. The Meghna then flows south for another 160 km before finally discharging into the Bay of Bengal. Thus, most of Bangladesh is flood plain of the GBM river system. Except some hills in the northeast and southeast, about 80 per cent of the landmass of Bangladesh<sup>48</sup> is alluvial deltaic plain with an average elevation above sea-level of only 10 meters that is formed by more than 250 rivers, and their numerous tributaries and distributaries. These include no less than 57 international/trans-boundary rivers of which 54 flow into the country through India. These rivers carry an enormous discharge of water from the Himalayas. The combined flow of these rivers discharges under the name of Meghna into the north-eastern corner of the Bay of Bengal. Being in the combined catchment area of the GBM river basin, it drains 92 per cent of the flow out into the Bay of Bengal, which is the major cause of flooding.<sup>49</sup> As a result of flat topography of the floodplain, between 20-68 per cent of the country is flooded each year by overflowing rivers during monsoon when the rainfall within the country is also very high.<sup>50</sup> Bangladesh has a tropical monsoon climate with significant variations in rainfall and temperature throughout the country. About 80 per cent of the total rainfall occurs in the monsoon, and the average annual precipitation over the country is 2320 mm.<sup>51</sup>

The most discharges of the three main rivers – the Ganges, the Brahmaputra and the Meghna occur generally during the monsoon period of Bangladesh and

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<sup>48</sup> “Geography of Bangladesh”, available at <http://worldfacts.us/Bangladesh-geography.htm> accessed on 17 April 2011.

<sup>49</sup> National Plan for Disaster Management 2008-2015 (Final Draft for Approval), Disaster Management Bureau, Ministry of Food and Disaster Management, Government of Bangladesh, May 2008, available at [http://www.dmb.gov.bd/reports/National%20Plan%20for%20Disaster%20Management-Final%20draft%20\(12%20August%202008\).pdf](http://www.dmb.gov.bd/reports/National%20Plan%20for%20Disaster%20Management-Final%20draft%20(12%20August%202008).pdf) accessed on 03 January 2009.

<sup>50</sup> Shardul Agrawala *et al.*, *Development and Climate Change in Bangladesh: Focus on Coastal Flooding and the Sundarbans*, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2003, available at [http://www.adaptationlearning.net/profiles/country/files/OECD2003\\_BangladeshCoastalFlooding.pdf](http://www.adaptationlearning.net/profiles/country/files/OECD2003_BangladeshCoastalFlooding.pdf) accessed on 25 July 2009.

<sup>51</sup> FAO: Aquastat, available at <http://www.fao.org/nr/water/aquastat/countries/bangladesh/index.stm> accessed on 25 June 2011.

the combined discharge is among the highest in the world. Peak discharges are of the order of 100000 m<sup>3</sup>/s in the Brahmaputra, 75000 m<sup>3</sup>/s in the Ganges, 20000 m<sup>3</sup>/s in the upper Meghna and 160000 m<sup>3</sup>/s in the lower Meghna.<sup>52</sup> On an average, almost 1106 km<sup>3</sup> of water crosses the borders of Bangladesh annually, of which 85 per cent between June and October. Around 54 per cent (599 km<sup>3</sup>) is contributed by the Brahmaputra, 31 per cent (344 km<sup>3</sup>) by the Ganges and nearly 15 per cent (163 km<sup>3</sup>) by the tributaries of the Meghna and other minor rivers.<sup>53</sup> The internal renewable water resources are estimated at 105 km<sup>3</sup>/year. The overlap being considered negligible though includes 84 km<sup>3</sup> of surface water produced internally, as stream flows from rainfall and about 21 km<sup>3</sup> of groundwater resources produced within the country. Part of the groundwater comes from the infiltration of surface water with an external origin. Since annual cross-border river flows and entering groundwater are estimated to be 1105.64 km<sup>3</sup>, the total renewable water resources are therefore estimated at 1210.64 km<sup>3</sup>.<sup>54</sup>

In Bangladesh, groundwater source is the most widely used water source. About 97 per cent of the rural population and 82 per cent of the urban population are dependent on groundwater source.<sup>55</sup> The properties of the groundwater storage reservoir and the volume of annual recharge dictate the availability of groundwater resources in Bangladesh. Key factors which determine groundwater availability include the capacity of the country's aquifers to store water, and the characteristics which govern economic withdrawal of groundwater for irrigation, domestic and industrial needs.<sup>56</sup> The source of recharge is rainfall, flooding, and stream flow in rivers. The quaternary alluvium of Bangladesh constitutes a huge aquifer with reasonably good transmission and storage properties. Heavy rainfall and inundation during the monsoon help the aquifers to be substantially recharged annually.<sup>57</sup>

### 3. Gap between the Demand and Supply of Water

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<sup>52</sup> "Water Profile of Bangladesh", *The Encyclopedia of Earth*, available at [http://www.eoearth.org/article/Water\\_profile\\_of\\_Bangladesh](http://www.eoearth.org/article/Water_profile_of_Bangladesh) accessed on 25 July 2011.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> FAO: Aquastat, *op.cit.*

<sup>55</sup> Khondaker Azharul Haq, "Water Management in Dhaka", *International Journal of Water Resources Development*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2006, p. 296

<sup>56</sup> FAO: Aquastat, *op.cit.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*

Around 1 per cent of total water resources in Bangladesh is withdrawn for human uses annually; of the total withdrawals, 86 per cent is used for agriculture, 12 per cent for domestic water supply and 2 per cent for industrial sector.<sup>58</sup> Sources of water used in agriculture in Bangladesh are: surface water 30.8 per cent and ground water 69.2 per cent.<sup>59</sup> Notwithstanding the fact that Bangladesh is among the countries having the highest per capita volume of surface water, a large proportion of the population of the country is yet to gain access to safe sources of drinking water due to local and/or seasonal water shortages and, due to natural and man-made forms of water pollution. According to a recently published United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) report, about 80 per cent of the total population in Bangladesh has access to an improved source of water.<sup>60</sup> The most widely used groundwater source is depleting very fast due to over exploitation. This is creating huge gaps between water demand and water supply. In the capital city of Dhaka, the Water and Sewerage Authority (WASA) has a capacity to supply 1.27 billion litres per day against a demand of 1.6 billion litres for its residents.<sup>61</sup> The Dhaka WASA has 237 deep tube wells, 3 treatment plants, 1,610 km of water lines, 171,855 water line connections, 38 overhead tanks, and 1,643 roadside taps. Even then, there remains a gap between the demand and supply which stands at a staggering .33 billion litres a day.<sup>62</sup> Due to the acute water supply situation in Dhaka during the dry season, deployment of military in aid to WASA has now become a regular phenomenon for the last couple of years. The most alarming fact is that, in Dhaka, the groundwater level is dropping by three metres a year. According to the Dhaka WASA, the groundwater table was at

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<sup>58</sup> "COUNTRY PROFILE – Bangladesh", *World Resources Institute, Water Resources and Freshwater Ecosystems*, available at <http://www.wri.org/project/earthtrends/text/water-resources/country-profile-14.html> accessed on 20 July 2010.

<sup>59</sup> "Acute Water Crisis in Bangladesh", *Perspective*, available at <http://www.perspectivebd.com/acute-water-crisis-in-bangladesh-impact-on-living/> accessed on 12 September 2011.

<sup>60</sup> "Population 16.44cr", *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 21 October 2010.

<sup>61</sup> "Bangladesh Water Crisis", available at <http://gurumia.com/2010/03/29/bangladesh-water-crisis/> accessed on 21 July 2010.

<sup>62</sup> Available at [www.itt.com/waterbook/Bangladesh.asp](http://www.itt.com/waterbook/Bangladesh.asp) - Cached - accessed on 20 July 2010.

11.3m below the surface in the 1970s and at 20m in the 1980s.<sup>63</sup> However, a study conducted by Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) in 2007 reveals that in 1996, the groundwater level was 26.60 metres below the surface which by 2007, had gone down to 61.18 metres.<sup>64</sup> This means a fall of about 35 metres in just 11 years. BADC researchers have blamed the city's increasing population and little recharging of groundwater over the years for this unwanted precarious situation. Dhaka being a fast growing city due to its increasing number of population, most of the wetlands and river banks have been encroached in the recent times for construction which is barring full recharging of groundwater during the monsoons.

In the rural areas of Bangladesh, since the 1960s, about 1.2 million hand pump tube wells have been installed by government authorities and six times as many tube wells have been installed by private individuals, NGOs and other agencies.<sup>65</sup> Every year, a number of water pumps/ tube wells are being abandoned, and new pumps/ tube wells are constructed/ installed as they fail to lift desired amount of water or marked unsafe or contaminated for consumption. In the dry season, most of the surface water sources of Bangladesh get dried up and water flow in majority of the rivers remain at a level which is significantly low. Consequently, huge gap is created between the demand and supply. Water flow is required for averting siltation of rivers all over the country especially in the dry season, which affects navigability, and increases incidences of flood. There is also a critical need for minimum flow of water in the rivers to ward off intrusion of salinity in the coastal areas; it is important for habitants in those areas for agriculture, forestry and biodiversity, and also for availability of drinking water. In reality during the lean period there always remains a gap between the need and availability. This predicament of the country is largely contributed by the prevailing natural problem in the GBM river system that has been aggravated by various development activities like, flood control and irrigation projects particularly, dams and barrages on the upstream of common rivers.

#### **4. Effects Due to the Rising Gap between the Demand and Supply of Water**

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<sup>63</sup> Available at <http://www.downtoearth.org.in/node/4641> accessed on 23 December 2011.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>65</sup> "Access to Safe Drinking Water", available at [www.pravdabangladesh.wordpress.com/access-to-safe-drinking-water](http://www.pravdabangladesh.wordpress.com/access-to-safe-drinking-water) accessed on 21 July 2010.

Due to gaps between the demand and supply of water in Bangladesh, severe consequences are already visible on various fields. The growing process of deforestation precipitated by the pressure of ever increasing population, poverty and energy deficiency are disrupting the natural equilibrium of environment rapidly and ruthlessly with devastating effects, among others, on the rivers. As most of the Eastern Himalayan River systems finally discharge into the Bay of Bengal flowing through Bangladesh, the country faces the major brunt of these devastating effects. To this is added the ever deteriorating and increasingly unpredictable impacts of climate change. As a lower riparian country Bangladesh is the worst victim of all these.

Notwithstanding the fact that Bangladesh is a riverine country, it is gradually turning into a water-scarce country. Among the sources of surface water, many rivers are virtually becoming extinct and polluted as well, which means they do not or cannot provide usable freshwater. Among about 250 rivers that once crisscrossed the country, many are facing the crisis of existence.<sup>66</sup> Surface water sources e.g. rivers, lakes, marshes etc due to over extraction of water, are becoming polluted, dry and losing navigability in many cases. The situation in Bangladesh, especially in the cities, with respect to water hazard and contamination is appalling. Factories and residents discharge harmful chemicals and toxic wastes into the rivers. The four rivers surrounding Dhaka city have already become dead seriously hampering the life of the people dependent on the rivers and likely to worsen day by day. In the last twenty years, a convergence of unregulated industrial expansion, rural-to-city migration, encroachment of the rivers, overloaded infrastructure, confusion about institutional responsibility for the quality of Dhaka's waterbodies, and very ineffective enforcement of environmental regulations have all taken their toll on surface water quality.<sup>67</sup> The rivers in the rest of the country are suffering similar disasters. The latest study of BIWTA reveals that 117 rivers are either dead or have lost navigability which include Brahmaputra, Padma, Mahananda, Meghna, Titas, Dhaleswari, Bhairab, Sitalakkhya, Turag, etc.<sup>68</sup> In Dhaka city alone, everyday about 2 million tons of waste is dumped into the surrounding rivers; each year about 2.4 billion tons of

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<sup>66</sup> Md. Asadullah Khan ,“Water Security Hampers Development”, *The Daily Star*, 26 September 2010.

<sup>67</sup> “Dhaka Environment and Water Project” available at [http://www.doe-bd.org/DEW%20Project%20Limited %20 ESA%20%20ESMF\\_Main.pdf](http://www.doe-bd.org/DEW%20Project%20Limited%20ESA%20%20ESMF_Main.pdf) accessed on 12 December 2011.

<sup>68</sup> Md. Shariful Islam, *op.cit.*

sediment from the Himalayas is carried by the rivers of Bangladesh into the Bay of Bengal.<sup>69</sup>

Beside the necessity of water for direct consumption and industrial use, it is also required for any kind of food production activity. Agricultural production of the country is suffering huge difficulties due to non-availability of water during the dry period. In Bangladesh, agricultural activities are mainly confined in the rural parts of the country. River water had been the primary source of irrigation since the ancient times. With the rising demand of water in agriculture as well as reduction of water in the rivers due to interventions in the up streams, initially agriculture was badly affected. By last three decades, farmers switched over to costliest means of using ground water through installing shallow and deep tube wells. But the yearly recharge of the aquifers is less than before. As a result, growing dependence on ground water is lowering the water table, making arsenic contamination - a pervasive health hazard.

Long deprivation of water may give rise to deadly social instability. This is already visible in many areas of the country. There are people often waiting for long hours in long queues just for a bucket of water whereas many areas have been suffering continuously from water-logging. A good example is the Bhavadaha of Jessore district in the southwest part of the country. In the coastal southern areas of the country due to tidal surge many flood protection embankments have been washed away. Consequently, people are continuously suffering from water-logging and facing the acute crisis of drinking and usable water which they have to collect far away from their home. Due to the nature of society and culture there are also other social crises associated with poor access to safe drinking water in Bangladesh.

## **5. Security Implications**

Owing to increasing water crises in Bangladesh there is a distressing impact on the live and livelihood of a huge population of the country. These are quite visible on the environment/non-traditional security sphere of the country which may in course of time are likely to be posing severe threats to the security and stability of the country. Some of these are discussed in the succeeding paragraphs.

### *Outbreak of Epidemics*

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<sup>69</sup> "Acute Water Crisis in Bangladesh: Impact on Living" available at [perspectivebd.com](http://perspectivebd.com) accessed on 21 July 2011.

As water is becoming polluted, it is no wonder that the country risks outbreak of epidemics of waterborne diseases. It has been witnessed on many occasions during and the aftermaths of disasters like flood, or cyclone as natural disasters are a regular incidence in the country. In Bangladesh, about 1,10,000 children die a year because of waterborne diseases.<sup>70</sup>

#### *Arsenic Poisoning*

Bangladesh has become a victim of arsenic poisoning due to over exploitation of groundwater. This is an emerging threat to public health. Water is being contaminated with arsenic frequently, because of the high arsenic contents in the soil. Now-a-days, arsenic poisoning has become a grave concern, as it affects the people physically, economically, and psychologically.<sup>71</sup> A recent survey by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics and the United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) showed that 12.6 per cent of Bangladesh households, or about 20 million people, still drink water containing arsenic above the government's recommendation of no more than 50 micrograms per litre.<sup>72</sup> Groundwater of 61 surveyed districts out of total 64 is contaminated with arsenic. According to the World Health Organization, arsenic-contaminated water directly affects the health of 35 million people in Bangladesh.<sup>73</sup> Some basic data about arsenic contamination in Bangladesh is given below:

**Table 1**

*Basic data about arsenic contamination in Bangladesh*

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Estimated number of tube wells in Bangladesh: 8,600,000</li> <li>• Tube wells tested for arsenic 4,750,000</li> <li>• Tube wells marked green (safe) 3,300,000</li> <li>• Tube wells marked red (unsafe) 1,400,000</li> <li>• Estimated total villages in country 87,319</li> <li>• Villages screened 54,041</li> <li>• Villages where &lt; 40 per cent of the wells are contaminated 37,332</li> <li>• Villages where 40-80 per cent of the wells are contaminated 8,331</li> <li>• Villages where 80-99 per cent of the wells are contaminated 6,062</li> </ul>
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<sup>70</sup> "Some 1,10,000 Children Die of Waterborne Diseases Annually in Bangladesh", *The China Daily*, 09 November 2008.

<sup>71</sup> Arsenic results in skin lesions, swollen limbs and loss of feeling in the hands and legs. Long-term exposure to arsenic can also lead to cancer; possible organs which may be affected are lungs, bladder and kidneys.

<sup>72</sup> Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSTRE62L35P20100322> accessed on 20 July 2011.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Villages where all wells contaminated 2,316</li> </ul> |
|---|

Source: Arsenic Mitigation in Bangladesh, UNICEF, available at: <http://www.unicef.org/bangladesh/Arsenic.pdf>, accessed on 01 April 2010.

### *Difficulties in Groundwater-based Irrigation System*

Bangladesh is an agricultural country and heavily relies on irrigation system for its agricultural production. For the last couple of decades the irrigation system in the country is mostly groundwater-based due to non-availability of surface water sources. This groundwater-based irrigation system is experiencing difficulties in different parts of the country as shallow aquifer level is getting out of reach due to fast depletion of groundwater table. Shallow tube-wells (STWs) now cannot draw water for about 46 per cent irrigated cropland during dry season, says data from survey and monitoring of groundwater project and groundwater zoning map of Bangladesh. According to 2006-07 irrigation survey report of the government, around 10 million farmers had overwhelming dependence on STWs for almost 70 per cent of 47.8 lakh hectares of irrigated cropland in the season. The groundwater zoning map of BADC prepared in 2006 shows that a record high of 78 per cent irrigated cropland in Pabna has become critical for STW operation. The percentage of irrigated cropland critical for STW operation, and unable to draw water by STWs are shown in the table 2 and 3 below:

**Table 2**

*Percentage of irrigated cropland critical for STW operation*

Percentage of irrigated cropland critical for STW operation	Districts
78	Pabna
75	Comilla
60	Kushtia and Naogaon
55	Mymensingh and Cox's Bazar
50	Joypurhat
49	Chittagong
45	Bogra and Rajbari
30	Jhenidah, Netrakona, Gazipur and Narayanganj

Source: Prepared by author from the data available in: "Groundwater Depletion Hampers Irrigation", *The Daily Star*, 09 March 2008.

**Table 3**

*Percentage of irrigated cropland unable to draw water by STWs*

Percentage of irrigated cropland unable to draw water by STWs	Districts
28	Sherpur
20	Jamalpur and Tangail



18	Natore
16	Manikganj
15	Dhaka, Narsingdi and Sirajganj
10	Rajshahi, Chapainawabganj, Kishoreganj and Munshiganj

Source: Prepared by author from the data available in: "Groundwater Depletion Hampers Irrigation", *The Daily Star*, 09 March 2008.

#### *Food Security*

Bangladesh being a food deficit country, its security of food is facing severe challenges due to the non-availability of water required for food production during the harvesting season. The price hike in food items has severely endangered the country and its huge population. Already in the international market, food prices are going high. In the country, food price remains stable if there is a bumper production. Again a bumper production depends largely on timely availability of required irrigation water. Here, indirectly, water shortage is largely responsible for adverse impact on food price in the market. Climate change and rising temperatures have now badly disturbed food production patterns and have deepened food insecurity further. Due to changes in the seasonal weather patterns large populations of the country who are dependent on rain-fed subsistence farming are facing the negative impacts on their food production. For producing more food, groundwater is being excessively used; on the other hand, fertilizer effluents get washed into surface water sources and seep into groundwater thereby polluting them continuously.

#### *Rising Salinity*

Rising salinity in water is a growing problem in Bangladesh, especially in the country's coastal areas. Increase in salinity in water is endangering humans, plants and other life-forms. About 53 per cent of the coastal areas is negatively affected by salinity.<sup>74</sup> The main cause for the salinity is the reduced flow of the rivers of the affected areas which lost their navigability over the years due to withdrawal of water during dry season at the upstream of the Ganges. This has been further aggravated by the introduction of shrimp cultivation in the 1970s. According to Government's Soil Resource Development Institute, salinity caused by growing shrimp cultivation over the last three and half decades, damaged the soil fertility of more than one million hectares of coastal arable land that could

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<sup>74</sup> S A Haque, "Salinity Problems and Crop Production in the Coastal Areas of Bangladesh", available at [www.pakbs.org/pjbot/PDFs/38\(5\)/PJB38\(5\)1359.pdf](http://www.pakbs.org/pjbot/PDFs/38(5)/PJB38(5)1359.pdf) accessed on 25 May 2011.

have yielded 2.5 million tons of rice.<sup>75</sup> Large areas are converted into shrimp enclosures which are obviously saltwater ponds. To lessen their expenses, farmers create channels from the estuaries to drain saltwater into their respective ponds. Once entered, the saltwater destroys the fundamental element of the soil by gradual salt sedimentation into the land. In the process, it destroys water (surface ones), ground water and the dependent flora and fauna. Shrimp cultivation is also blamed for salinity in ground water pumped out by deep tube wells and withering of trees, several aquatic plants, weeds, and local fish species.

#### *Earthquake Risks*

As groundwater is overexploited and surface water is destroyed, the soil below the earth becomes hollow; as a result, the land overburdened with people and infrastructure, becomes very much vulnerable to earthquakes. Recently, on 11 September 2010, a quake of 4.8 magnitude rocked the capital city of Dhaka. The observatory at Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology (BUET) recorded 86 tremors of over four magnitude during January 2006 to May 2009. Another four earthquakes took place with magnitude of over five during the period. According to a seismic zoning map prepared by BUET, 43 per cent areas in Bangladesh are rated high risk, 41 per cent moderate and 16 per cent low in terms of earthquake risk.<sup>76</sup>

#### *Emergence of Inter-State Conflicts*

The implications of water crisis may well be visible on the traditional security sphere. Due to severe shortage of water, many kind of social instability are very much likely to arise for Bangladesh both at the national and regional levels. Such developments in the past generated a number of inter-state disputes. Examples are abound, e.g. Turkey, Syria, and Iraq have conflicts over the Euphrates and Tigris rivers; the Jordan River conflict among Israel, Lebanon, Jordan and the Palestinian territories; in Africa, the Nile River-related conflicts among Egypt, Ethiopia, and Sudan. Emergence of such kinds of conflicts may not be unusual in the South Asian region. A specific mention may be made of Bangladesh-India dispute over the Farakka Barrage, which in course of time, turned out to be the most stumbling block in the way of co-operation between the two countries. The dispute persisted for more than a quarter of a century and thwarted all efforts at cooperation between the two countries in managing and developing the

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<sup>75</sup> "Shrimp Farming Deals Major Blow to South", *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 26 May 2011.

<sup>76</sup> Helemul Alam, "Bangladesh Runs High Quake Risk", *The Daily Star*, Dhaka, 12 August 2009.

common water resources of the Ganges and other fifty three rivers that flow from India through Bangladesh and empty into the Bay of Bengal.<sup>77</sup>

## **6. Management Aspects including Trans-national Cooperation**

Conventionally, management of water resources has been associated with the need to cater for human requirements in terms of drinking water, food and other tangible goods.<sup>78</sup> In recent times, management of water resources has become a critical issue owing to the growing demand in the backdrop of reduced availability and access. Lenton said that water management means different things to different people, ranging from a household to a global perspective. For example, he noted, a farmer focuses on how to maximize yield with the water available to increase profits, while national policymakers consider how to ensure food security for citizens while minimizing water used by agriculture so that other needs can be met.<sup>79</sup> Since the pre-independence period, the governments in Bangladesh had taken various plans like national water management plan, integrated costal management plan, haor master plan, national water resources management plan etc. The Ground Water Management Ordinance, 1985 was endorsed by the government to manage the ground water resources for agricultural production. The government in 1992 adopted the National Environmental Policy, appended with an implementation programme. This policy embraces 15 development sectors including agriculture, industry, health and sanitation, energy, water, land, forest, fisheries and livestock, coastal and marine environment, and others. In 1999, the National Water Policy (NWP) was adopted which covered almost all important issues regarding water resources management along with the issue of trans-boundary water management and most of the global concerns. One of the most important goals of the National Water Policy is to address issues related to the harnessing and development of all forms of surface water and groundwater, and management of these resources in an efficient and equitable manner.

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<sup>77</sup> For details on the dynamics of conflict between Bangladesh and India on the distribution of Ganges water, see, A. K. M. Abdus Sabur and Mohammad Humayun Kabir, *Conflict Management and Sub-Regional Co-operation in ASEAN: Relevance for SAARC*, Dhaka: Academic Press and Publishers Limited, 2000, pp.65-67.

<sup>78</sup> Available at <ftp://ftp.fao.org/agl/aglw/docs/misc25.pdf> accessed on 11 December 2011.

<sup>79</sup> Available at <http://waterforfood.nebraska.edu/wfi-in-the-news/no-single-solution-for-water-food-security> accessed on 11 December 2011.

The activities in the water sector in Bangladesh, had traditionally been focused on flood control, drainage and irrigation to support the agriculture sector, and in that process those had neglected role of water in other sectors such as fisheries, navigation, domestic water supply and sanitation, industrial water supply, recreation, ecology and nature, hydropower and disaster management.<sup>80</sup> Bangladesh being a flood prone country, without a doubt, there is an increased need for flood management and flood protection. Flood management and flood protection schemes may have to protect both rural and urban areas of the flood prone zones. Generally, the government has its roles and responsibilities in respect of policy, legislation and the major regulation and protection works. In addition, other agencies including the local level government, farmers and other stakeholders may each have their roles and responsibilities. National Water Policy of 1999 calls for decentralization and emphasizes the participation of communities in planning, development, operation and maintenance of water supply and sanitation facilities through local government and community-based organizations.<sup>81</sup> However, in the practical field there always remains a gap and it is often not clear who is responsible for which part of such projects/ facilities. Therefore, the efforts undertaken by the government and other stakeholders should be comprehensive, well coordinated and farsighted to deal with this problem.

In last twenty years the government of Bangladesh has undertaken substantial number of flood management and flood protection projects with the assistance of International Agencies and donor countries. The government has taken a number of steps such as afforestation of the foreshore to protect against tidal surges. An Integrated Coastal Zone Management Programme is underway to take care of many pressing problems unique to Coastal areas of Bangladesh. The government is working to increase future inflow of fresh water through the Gorai river system to the south- western part of the country in order to reduce the effect of salinity. It is also interesting to note that there are increasing trends of efforts undertaken in research activities for inventing new agricultural products for coastal and salinity-prone areas, to devise environment-friendly variety of crop, determine suitable agriculture production areas and invent agriculture variety in the wake of climate change.

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<sup>80</sup> Summary Proceedings of Panel Discussion on *Managing Water Security: Ganga-Brahmaputra Basin*, organised by Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies at Dhaka on 16 June 2010, available at, <http://www.biiss.org/proceedingwsm.pdf> accessed on 11 December 2011.

<sup>81</sup> Pravidbangladesh, *op. cit.*

As regards dredging of the rivers, not much effort could be spared by the government in the past. However, the Bangladesh government has recently undertaken a capital dredging project involving Taka 11,000 crore to reclaim 53 rivers from encroachers. Under this capital project, the Bangladesh Inland Water Transport Authority (BIWTA) has procured few dredgers to strengthen its existing dredging capacity and many more are on the pipeline.<sup>82</sup>

To mitigate the arsenic crisis of the country the government of Bangladesh has initiated various actions through the Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE), local administration and local government. UNICEF has the largest arsenic response programme in Bangladesh and is working with the DPHE. With a view to increasing people's access to safe drinking water free from arsenic and pathogen in rural communities, the DPHE has undertaken a project entitled 'Bangladesh Water Supply Program Project' with assistance from the World Bank.<sup>83</sup> In this regard, an integrated approach is essential involving expertise in mobilizing community, testing water quality, designing appropriate safe water option, and identifying the patients while giving proper advice on safe water and nutrition as well as medical care.<sup>84</sup>

At the regional level, during a Summit Meeting on 12 December 1996, Prime Minister of Bangladesh Sheikh Hasina and her Indian counterpart Deve Gowda signed a Treaty that envisages the sharing of Ganges water between the two countries for the next 30 years.<sup>85</sup> Under the agreement, Bangladesh will receive a 50 per cent share of the Ganges water when the water flow at Farakka is less than 70,000 cusecs. If the flow rises beyond that level, Bangladesh is guaranteed 35,000 cusecs; if it passes the 75,000 cusec mark, India is guaranteed 40,000 cusecs.<sup>86</sup> The Treaty also stipulated that the countries would conclude long term sharing agreements with regard to other transboundary rivers, of which the sharing issue

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<sup>82</sup> *The Financial Express*, Dhaka, 17 January 2012.

<sup>83</sup> *The New Nation*, Dhaka, 28 March 2010.

<sup>84</sup> Available at

[http://www.buet.ac.bd/itn/pages/apsudocs/position\\_papers\\_annexes.pdf](http://www.buet.ac.bd/itn/pages/apsudocs/position_papers_annexes.pdf)

accessed on 13 December 2011.

<sup>85</sup> A. K. M. Abdus Sabur and Mohammad Humayun Kabir, *op.cit.*, pp.82-83.

<sup>86</sup> Treaty between the Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh and the Government of the Republic of India on Sharing of the Ganga/Ganges Waters at Farakka, Joint Rivers Commission Bangladesh, Ministry of Water Resources, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, available at: <http://jrbc.gov.bd/treaty.html> accessed on 17 April 2010.

of the Teesta River was accorded the first priority. Accordingly, it was expected that the rest of the disputes between Bangladesh and India over the distribution of the waters of other rivers could also be settled amicably. Unfortunately, no progress has been made in the last one and half decades. However, in a Joint Communique issued at the end of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's state visit to India from January 10-13, 2010, Dr. Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India emphasised that the two Prime Ministers agreed to put in place a comprehensive framework of cooperation for development between the two countries, which would include cooperation in water resources. In practice, the Communique<sup>87</sup> dealt with immediate issues like the lean season flows of the Teesta River as well as the long-standing issues like the management of common water resources taking into account the totality of Bangladesh-India common rivers.

Meanwhile, since the end of 2008, the Indian government has resumed the process of construction of the Tipaimukh Dam once again which was first initiated in 2003 and stalled amidst violent national and international protests in 2007. The Tipaimukh Dam is 500m downstream from the confluence of the Barak, the second largest drainage system to the northeast of India and a km north of Jakiganj in Sylhet, Bangladesh, and the Tuivai river in the southwestern corner of Manipur, India. If the dam is constructed, the districts of eastern Bangladesh and surroundings will be immediately affected and experts fear that immense natural disasters are likely to take place which would be incomparable. Added to this is the India's river linking concept, aimed at intra-basin and inter-basin water transfers throughout the country. The project involves massive withdrawal of waters at upstream. The project has raised serious concern in Bangladesh as diversion of water from common rivers through construction of barrages, particularly on the tributary and distributaries of the Brahmaputra River would have severe implications for the availability of fresh water. Experts estimated that diverting just 10 to 20 per cent of water of the Brahmaputra River in India could cause 100 Bangladeshi rivers to dry.<sup>88</sup>

Though, a process of cooperation in the management of water resources of Bangladesh-India common rivers between the two countries was initiated by the Joint Communique issued in 2010, the much awaited Teesta river accord could not be signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's Dhaka visit in September 2011. It was due to last-minute opposition from the West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee. So, in last forty years since the independence of Bangladesh, out of 54 major rivers, water-sharing agreement of only one river

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<sup>87</sup> For the text of the Joint Communique, see, <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=121706> accessed on 31 March 2010.

<sup>88</sup> Pravidbangladesh, *op. cit.*

- the Ganges was signed in 1996 between the two countries. As such, the hope that was generated that through transforming the issues of conflict into those of cooperation, substantive progress would be achieved in relation to the cooperative management of the waters of common rivers of Bangladesh and India remains to be seen. The signing of the long standing water sharing accords could facilitate addressing a host of developmental issues pertaining to agriculture, forestry, biodiversity, physical infrastructure, industry, resource depletion, sustaining the ecosystem, management of the environmental degradation and so on of the two neighbours.

## **7. Conclusion**

It is a general understanding that Bangladesh will not suffer from water shortage as it is a country of about 250 rivers. The reality on the ground is quite different; it gets much water during monsoon, while during the dry season it suffers from shortage of water. The country has little or no control over the flow of water coming from outside during monsoon but faces growing challenges during the dry season that include arsenic contamination, salinity, ground water shortage as well as shortages in natural environmental water requirements and so on. Thus, realities are becoming harsher day by day as the country increasingly faces water crises which are becoming worse by the adverse impacts of climate change.

As discussed, the main reason of its water crises is the low flows of water due to upstream intervention by India which significantly affects surface water availability during the dry period. The major problems faced by Bangladesh due to water shortages include loss of navigation and transportation, loss of irrigation water for agriculture, degradation of ecological qualities, hampering industrial activities, arsenic contamination in the underground water, excessive sedimentation, river bank erosion, etc. As end result of all these, there is a distressing impact on the live and livelihood of the huge population of the country. Bangladesh being the downstream country, any water management programme undertaken by it is unlikely to be fully effective without the close cooperation from the upper riparian countries, particularly India.

The right of Bangladesh's population to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation is greatly denied due to the prevailing condition though in a 2010 resolution, the United Nations General Assembly recognised "the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation as a human right that is essential for the full enjoyment of the right to life".<sup>89</sup> In a country like Bangladesh laden with too much population and too much vulnerability to natural disasters, the situation is

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<sup>89</sup> Available at [http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/tr\\_Uploads/OrtadoguBulteni/2012611\\_orsamwaterbulletin79.pdf](http://www.orsam.org.tr/tr/tr_Uploads/OrtadoguBulteni/2012611_orsamwaterbulletin79.pdf) accessed on 21 December 2011.

and will be quite grim when water shortage gets a tighter grip. Bangladesh's water security situation is further compounded by the unforeseen impacts the Tipaimukh Dam on the Barak would have on the northeastern part of the country, and the probability of unimaginable disaster the country might suffer if India starts implementing the river-linking project. Under such circumstances it is crucial for Bangladesh to put into effect water-sharing agreements with India for all the transboundary rivers.

With the signing of the Bangladesh-India agreement in the Summit Meeting of January 2010, the stage has already been set to work on the water-sharing agreement for all the 54 transboundary rivers in phases encompassing a wide-ranging framework of cooperation in the management of common water resources for mutual benefits. However, despite efforts undertaken by the government of both the countries, the much awaited Teesta river accord is yet to be signed. Therefore, the management of common water resources taking into account the totality of Bangladesh-India common rivers could hardly be achieved without the involvement of all other stake holders. Under such a complex scenario, all other stake holders including the Eastern Himalayan River systems co-basin states particularly Nepal and Bhutan may also have to be involved in the process of water-sharing arrangement of the transboundary rivers. It will definitely widen the scope of cooperation among these South Asian states in terms of exploring the common water resources and putting into effect a well integrated water management system for the benefit of millions of people of the region. The efforts of all the Eastern Himalayan River systems co-basin states should focus on to work toward a framework for management functions that will integrate consideration of the present and future, of economics and environmental preservation, of technology and building the capacities, of growth, and of food and water security therefore, overall sustainability of the region.



*Benuka Ferdousi*

## **DURBAN CLIMATE CHANGE CONFERENCE 2011: AN ASSESSMENT**

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### **Abstract**

Climate change can be termed as the greatest challenge of the 21<sup>st</sup> century as the very existence of human civilisation on the planet Earth is at stake. It is, therefore, imperative to assess the United Nations (UN) Climate Change Conferences in order to see how far the world leaders have progressed to work out a climate regime capable of avoiding irreversible and catastrophic change in climate. This paper aims to make an assessment of the latest UN Climate Change Conference which was held in 2011 in Durban, South Africa. Besides presenting the outcome of the conference, the paper attempts to underline the factors that led to this outcome and analyses the role of different countries in this regard. The paper argues that climate change is not merely an issue of natural science; rather it is very closely linked to global economic and political structures. Hence, what is happening in UN climate negotiations is a reflection of global politics.

### **1. Introduction**

The United Nations Climate Change Conference 2011 took place in Durban, South Africa from 28 November to 9 December. Since the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) entered into force, the Parties to the treaty gather annually to assess progress in dealing with climate change. The Durban Conference is the 17<sup>th</sup> of this kind which otherwise is known as COP 17 (17<sup>th</sup> Conference of the Parties). Representatives from 195 nations participated in the conference with a view to find a path to keep the rise of global temperature “at a level that would prevent dangerous anthropogenic interference with the climate system.”<sup>90</sup>

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Today, there is no doubt about the impacts of climate change. As the UN Secretary General Ban Ki Moon said in his remarks to the high level segment of the conference, “Without exaggeration, we can say: the future of our planet is at stake. People’s lives, the health of global economy, the very survival of some nations.”<sup>91</sup> There is plenty of literature narrating the devastating effects of climate change. The Norwegian refugee council has estimated that in 2010 as many as 35 million people were displaced worldwide due to extreme weather events caused by global warming.<sup>92</sup> Nearly 350,000 deaths are taking place every year due to the exacerbating effects of climate change on major health concerns like malnutrition, diarrhoeal diseases, infections and malaria.<sup>93</sup> It is, therefore, imperative to assess each UN Climate Conference in order to see how far the world leaders have progressed to work out a climate regime capable of avoiding irreversible and catastrophic change in climate.

In this context, this paper aims to make an assessment of Durban Climate Change Conference. The paper attempts to answer the following questions: What was the outcome of the conference? What were the underlying factors that led to this outcome? What roles did different countries play in the conference? What will be the future implications of all that happened in the conference?

The paper is divided into eight sections including the introduction. Section 2 presents a brief overview of UN climate talks with a view to set the background in which COP 17 has taken place. Section 3 describes the issues and outcomes of the conference while section 4 focuses on roles of different countries in this regard. Section 5 deals with role of Bangladesh during the conference. In section 6 the author makes an assessment of

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<sup>90</sup> Article 2, United Nations Framework Convention on [Climate Change](#).

<sup>91</sup> Remarks of the Secretary General to UNFCCC COP 17 high level Segment, available at:

[http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/durban\\_nov\\_2011/statements/application/pdf/11206\\_cop17\\_hls\\_ban\\_ki\\_moon.pdf](http://unfccc.int/files/meetings/durban_nov_2011/statements/application/pdf/11206_cop17_hls_ban_ki_moon.pdf), accessed on: 19 January 2012.

<sup>92</sup> “Ball in Climate Culprit’s Court”, *The Daily Star*, 28 November 2011.

<sup>93</sup> *ibid.*

COP 17. Section 7 identifies some challenges for the future of UN climate talks and section 8 concludes the article.

## **2. UN Climate Talks: A Brief Overview**

The root of UN climate talks can be traced back in 1979 when the first World Climate Conference was held in Geneva, Switzerland. A detailed account of the climate talks is provided in Annex I.

After UNFCCC came into force in 1994, the First Conference of the Parties (COP 1), held in 1995, launched a new round of negotiations on a protocol which, unlike the UNFCCC, would be legally binding. It gave birth to Kyoto Protocol in COP 3 in 1997 which set mandatory emission limits for Annex I countries<sup>94</sup> mentioned in UNFCCC. In order to come into force, the Kyoto Protocol required that 55 countries, together producing at least 55 per cent of the world's 1990 Carbon dioxide emissions, must ratify the Protocol. This is known as the 55/55 target. The Protocol suffered a major setback in March, 2001, when the United States, which produced 36.1 per cent of the carbon dioxide emissions of the Protocol's Annex I countries, decided not to ratify the Protocol. As a result, ratification of Russia, which produces 17.4 per cent of emissions, became absolutely crucial for the protocol to come into force by achieving 55/55 target. After years of hesitation, in May 2004, Russia pledged to speed up its approval in return for the European Union's support for the country's bid to join the World Trade Organization (WTO).<sup>95</sup> Eventually, Russia ratified the Protocol in November 2004 and it came into force in 2005.

As the first commitment period of the Kyoto Protocol would end in 2012, the 2007 UN Climate Change Conference, held in Bali, adopted the

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<sup>94</sup> Countries included in Annex I of UNFCCC are - Australia, Austria, Belarus, Belgium, Bulgaria, Canada, Croatia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Monaco, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, Ukraine, United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and United States of America.

<sup>95</sup> "Russia's Putin Signs Kyoto Protocol", 5 *The US Today*, 05 November 2004.

Bali Road Map as a two-year process to finalise a binding agreement in 2009 in Copenhagen. Although the Copenhagen conference was much hyped up beforehand, with so much hope linked to it, there were signs that Copenhagen might fail to set new legal targets for emission reduction to replace the Kyoto Protocol.<sup>96</sup> Finally, to utter distress of the people worldwide, the conference ended with “Copenhagen Accord” which was “taken note of” but not “adopted”. The Accord, drafted by the US and the BASIC countries (China, India, Brazil and South Africa), was characterised by many as “a weak political statement”<sup>97</sup> “[w]ith no firm target for limiting the global temperature rise, no commitment to a legal treaty and no target year for peaking emissions”.<sup>98</sup> It was also criticised for the process it was reached; many blamed the process to be non-democratic and non-transparent. It was alleged that the Copenhagen process has undermined UN’s multilateral process of climate negotiations.<sup>99</sup> However, to save face, developed countries made a pledge in the accord to provide US\$ 30 billion to the developing world over the next three years, rising to US\$ 100 billion per year by 2020, to adapt to climate change, which provided basis to create the Green Climate Fund in the following Cancun conference.

Not surprisingly, expectation was much lower during the following Cancun conference. In August 2010, Ban Ki Moon expressed his doubt about reaching a globally agreed, comprehensive deal and suggested instead incremental steps.<sup>100</sup> Eventually, the Cancun conference moved away from focusing solely on global emission reduction and put greater

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<sup>96</sup> See, “Not-so-wonderful Copenhagen”, *The Economist*, 18 November 2009.

<sup>97</sup> John Vidal and Allegra Stratton, “Copenhagen summit veering towards farce, warns Ed Miliband”, *The Guardian*, 16 December 2009.

<sup>98</sup> “Key powers reach compromise at climate summit”, BBC News, **19 December 2009**.

<sup>99</sup> See, Martin Khor Khor, “Blame Denmark, not China, for Copenhagen failure”.

*The Guardian*, 28 December 2009; also see, Brian Tokar, “What Really Happened in Copenhagen?”, *The Independent*, 25 December 2009.

<sup>100</sup> “UN Chief Recommends Small Steps on Climate”, *New York Times*, 24 September 2010.

emphasis on adaptation measures.<sup>101</sup> The conference decided to establish the Cancun Adaptation Framework and the Adaptation Committee. It also adopted an agreement which includes a “Green Climate Fund”, worth US\$ 100 billion a year by 2020, to assist poorer countries in financing emission reduction and adaptation. A 40-nation “transition committee” was also formed to present a complete plan for the fund by the next climate conference in Durban. There was, of course, no agreement on how to extend the Kyoto Protocol, or whether developing countries should have binding emission reduction or whether rich countries would have to reduce emissions first.<sup>102</sup> However, it was identified by many that the main success of Cancun talks was simply to prevent the collapse of UN’s climate negotiations and to promote support for a shift to low carbon economies.<sup>103</sup>

### 3. COP 17: Issues and Outcomes

As section 2 suggests, all crucial issues had been left to be resolved in Durban Summit. Deciding the future of the Kyoto Protocol and forging a new international climate treaty were two most important of them. Besides broader issues like the future climate regime, the summit had to deal with narrow ones like implementation of earlier decisions.

The primary focus of the summit was the future of the Kyoto Protocol. The protocol’s first commitment period would expire in 2012. Some countries, particularly developing countries, hoped that developed countries would agree to further cut emissions under a second commitment period. The European Union (EU) made a pledge that it would sign up for fresh commitments taking effect from 2013 in exchange of an agreement on the roadmap to make an international climate treaty. The pledge of the EU was, however, little more than symbolic as it actually translated into the UN framework its existing plan for reducing European greenhouse-gas emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 over 1990 levels. Finally the EU signed up for the second commitment period,

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<sup>101</sup> J Jackson Ewing and Irene A Kuntjoro, “Cancun: Shifting Goals of Climate Talks”, *The Jakarta Post*, 29 December 2010.

<sup>102</sup> “Climate talks end with modest steps”, Reuters, 12 December 2010.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

declaring that New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland are also joining it.<sup>104</sup> The duration of the post-2013 commitments will be either five or eight years and negotiations on this will take place in 2012. On the other hand, Japan, Russia and Canada showed reluctance beforehand and did not sign up for the second commitment. Later on, Canada pulled itself out of the Kyoto Protocol which was supported by Russia.

More vital issue was how to forge a new international climate treaty that, in the language of those advocating for a more robust international approach, would require “legally binding” commitments from all countries, particularly the big emitters – both developed and developing. Such a treaty was expected to replace the Kyoto Protocol and possibly the voluntary approach embedded in the Cancun Agreements. At Durban, delegates did not try to negotiate the treaty itself as it was not possible to do so in a single conference. Rather, they took effort to establish a timeline for the deal. After two weeks of wrangling among the delegates and the last hour “huddling” between the EU and India, finally the summit came up with a compact two-page document termed as Durban Platform.

Durban Platform sets out a process for reaching a new agreement by 2015. Its significant elements are as follows: First, it notes a goal of keeping global temperature rise to 1.5 or 2.0 degrees celcius. More importantly, it notes that current voluntary commitments, made by countries at Cancun Summit, are insufficient to reach that goal. Second, the Platform asserts that countries should “launch a process to develop a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change applicable to all Parties.” Although this language is exceedingly vague and raised much criticism aftermath, even this indefinite assertion required tremendous amount of fineness and hours of haggling to please all Parties. What is significant is that for the first time, the Platform has brought all major GHG emitters under a single legal roof. Third, the platform states that drafting of the new legal deal will begin in 2012 and end up by 2015 while the deal itself will come into force by 2020.

In the conference, Russia proposed an amendment in Article 4.2 (f) of UNFCCC which demanded a periodic review of the country lists in Annex I and II. There was a deep divide on this proposal. Majority of the Parties

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<sup>104</sup> “UN charts new climate course”, *The Daily Star*, 12 December 2011.

supported continued discussions on this issue at COP 18 and hence it was left to be decided in the future.

On Green Climate Fund, the summit reached an agreement on its basic governance structure but uncertainty still remains about the source of the fund. The US special envoy for climate change, Todd Stern said during the conference that there was a misconception that developed country governments would fund all of the US\$ 100 billion a year through the Green Climate Fund. He claimed that the US\$ 100 billion would be the total from all sources, including individual governments, international development banks, private companies and carbon markets. The issue of how big a role the private sector should play in financing the Green Climate Fund had created uncertainty about operationalisation of the fund.<sup>105</sup>

The forum also made some progress on some other issues like procedure of international monitoring, reporting and verifying of voluntary emission reduction commitments made by countries; Reducing Emissions from Deforestation and forest Degradation (REDD), institutional approach to technology transfer and Clean Development Mechanism (CDM).

#### **4. Role of Different Countries**

The conference appeared as a scene of horse trading among two groups – one group was led by the EU and backed by a number of small island-nations and Least Developed Countries (LDC) and the other group consisted of the US, Canada, China, Russia, Japan, Brazil and India, the later termed by many as ‘the league of polluters’. The third distinct voice, heard in the Durban summit was that of the ALBA (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) countries’ which called for more ambitious emission reduction commitments by the industrialised countries. Subsequent paragraphs attempt to describe roles of these countries.

##### ***The EU***

As mentioned before, the EU pledged to sign up for second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol in return of agreement by all

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<sup>105</sup> Peter Fabricius, “Success of COP 17 in the balance”, available at: <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/kwazulu-natal/success-of-cop17-in-the-balance-1.1187390?ot=inmsa.ArticlePrintPageLayout.ot>, accessed on: 19 January 2012.

countries – both developed and developing ones – on the “roadmap” to make a “legally binding” international climate treaty which would bring all countries under a legal roof. Connie Hedegarrd, the EU climate change commissioner, said: “We are almost ready to be alone in a second commitment period [to the Kyoto protocol]. We don’t ask too much of the world that after this second period all countries will be legally bound.”<sup>106</sup> The EU tried up to the last hour to hammer out agreement on the roadmap. At the end, however, the original EU proposal aimed at a legally binding treaty was not agreed. The phrase “legally binding” was replaced with the vague words “a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force”. Nevertheless, the EU hailed the outcome of the summit as “historical breakthrough”.

### *LDCs and Small Island States*

In the UN climate negotiations, Least Developed Countries (LDC) and Small Island States are represented by several overlapped groups. The largest group is the Group of 77 or G-77 which actually consists of 132 countries. Being a divergent group, including the BASIC countries, the scope of G-77 to act as a voice of the LDCs and Small Island States is limited. Other groups are African Group, the coalition of LDCs and the Alliance of Small Island States (AOSIS). ALBA (The Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America) is a small but much vocal group consisting of eight Latin American and Caribbean countries.

In the conference, G-77 called for a second commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol as part of a balanced and comprehensive outcome for Durban. They also advocated for full operationalisation of Cancun Agreement.<sup>107</sup> AOSIS called for a new protocol under the AWGLCA<sup>108</sup> that will raise confidence in co-operative action for increased ambition.

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<sup>106</sup> John Vidal and Fiona Harvey, “Climate Deal Salvaged After Marathon Talks in Durban”, *The Guardian*, 11 December 2011.

<sup>107</sup> “Summary of the Durban Climate Change Conference”, *Earth Negotiations Bulletin*, Vol 12, No. 534, 13 December 2011.

<sup>108</sup> [Ad Hoc Working Group on Long-term Cooperative Action under the UNFCCC Convention](#)



The group of LDCs said that it was for a legally binding instrument, which sits alongside the Kyoto Protocol without prejudice to the discussions.<sup>109</sup> At the end, however, the role of AOSIS and the group of LDCs were limited in backing the EU proposal. Eventually, reaction of LDCs and small island states about the outcome of the conference was modest. Small island states said that they had gone along with the deal only because a collapse of the talks was of no help to their vulnerable nations. Tosi Mpanu-Mpanu, head of the African Group, said: “Of course we are not completely happy about the outcome, it lacks balance, but we believe it is starting to go into the right direction.”<sup>110</sup>

ALBA, on the other hand, played a more independent role in the Durban conference. Beforehand the conference, ALBA was working on a strategy to seek allies in developing countries on the issue of climate change.<sup>111</sup> In a preparatory meeting in Panama before the conference, ALBA achieved an important agreement with the Group of Least Developed Nations and African Group. The agreement, among others, recognised that achieving a global goal of limiting temperature increase to well below 1.5°C above pre-industrial levels is required to avoid dangerous interference with the climate system. It stated that Annex I Parties must commit to second and subsequent commitment periods under the Kyoto Protocol. It also demanded that Annex I Parties must reduce their emissions by at least 40 per cent by 2017 and 95 per cent by 2050, compared to 1990 levels.<sup>112</sup> During the conference, ALBA countries were

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<sup>109</sup>Meena Raman, “Deep Divide Over Legal Form”, *TWN Durban News Update*, 02 December 2011, available at: [http://ifg.org/pdf/durban\\_update11.pdf](http://ifg.org/pdf/durban_update11.pdf), accessed on: 30 December 2011.

<sup>110</sup> “UN charts new climate course”, *The Daily Star*, *op. cit.*

<sup>111</sup> Eduardo José González, “ALBA: Committed to the Success of the Durban Conference”, available at: <http://www.radiohc.cu/ing/specials/opinion/3975-alba-committed-to-the-success-of-the-durban-conference.html>, accessed on: 04 January 2012.

<sup>112</sup> Statement of Common Position by African Group, Group of Least Developed Countries and ALBA Group, available at: <http://climate-justice.info/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Statement-of-Common-Positions-Afr-LDC-ALBA-FINAL.pdf>, accessed on: 05 January 2012.

fixed to these demands. Naturally, they were not happy at the result of the conference. Venezuela's ambassador, Claudia Salerno expressed her deep concern dramatically, "This agreement will kill off everyone. It is a farce. It is immoral to ask developing countries to sell ourselves for \$100bn."<sup>113</sup>

### *The US*

So far, the US opposed the Kyoto Protocol on the ground that it had excluded China and other emerging developing countries who later on became major polluters. Durban summit saw no exception in this regard. A US State Department spokeswoman clearly declared that it would not weigh in on the Kyoto debate as it was not a party to the Protocol. She added that the US would give priority to the approach, negotiated in Copenhagen and then adopted in Cancun.<sup>114</sup> In case of global climate regime, the US always advocated for non-binding approach that it succeeded to introduce in Copenhagen. Hence, the US had reasons to be glad of the outcome – Durban Platform – that encompassed all countries and omitted the words "legally binding." This was reflected in the comment of the US chief negotiator Todd Stern: "I think in the end it ended up quite well...The first time you will see developing countries agreeing, essentially, to be bound by a legal agreement."<sup>115</sup>

### *China*

China, which is at present world's second largest economy but is still categorised as a developing country, has become world's top most polluter in recent years. It holds the view that today's climate change is the result of past emissions done by the developed countries and hence the primary responsibility to prevent climate change lies on them. This view was re-affirmed during Durban summit when the Chinese delegation chief Xie Zhenhua said, "Before the formal negotiation of China's obligation after 2020, we hope there should be a comprehensive and scientific appraisal of the first commitment period of Kyoto Protocol. Only based on this, it can

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<sup>113</sup> John Vidal and Fiona Harvey, "Climate Deal Salvaged After Marathon Talks in Durban", *op. cit.*

<sup>114</sup> "Rich in conspiracy against the poor", *The Daily Star*, 4 December 2011.

<sup>115</sup> "UN charts new climate course", *The Daily Star*, *op. cit.*

be fair for discussing China's legally binding emission cut."<sup>116</sup> However, China showed willingness to make binding commitments to limit emissions in 2020 on the condition that the regime would appropriately take into account historical contributions of greenhouse gases by developed countries as well as sustainable economic needs of developing countries such as China and India.

### ***India***

India holds the same view as China and had always opposed any binding commitment for developing countries. During the summit, India on one hand, insisted on saving the Kyoto Protocol. India's chief negotiator J M Mauskar said at the talks, "These are legal obligations of the developed world and must be fulfilled at Durban."<sup>117</sup> On the other hand, the country strongly opposed the EU's proposal for a legally binding treaty applicable to all countries. Indian environment minister, Jayanthi Natarajan, responded fiercely to the proposal: "Am I to write a blank cheque and sign away the livelihoods and sustainability of 1.2 billion Indians, without even knowing what the EU "roadmap" contains? I wonder if this an agenda to shift the blame on to countries who are not responsible [for climate change]. I am told that India will be blamed. Please do not hold us hostage."<sup>118</sup> The Indians held out for 36 hours after the summit was supposed to have ended, even when most other elements of a deal were in place. Their main point of opposition was the term "legally binding". With the prospect of no deal looming, the president of the conference urged the EU and Indian delegations to go "into a huddle" in the middle of the conference hall and work out a compromise. They did so and, as per a Brazilian suggestion, agreed to replace the phrase "legally binding" with the vague words "a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force". Yet the Indian Minister said her country had only reluctantly agreed to the accord. "We've had very intense discussions. We were not happy with reopening the text but in the spirit of

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<sup>116</sup> "China open to talks on binding emission cuts", *China Daily*, 5 December 2011.

<sup>117</sup> "India pushes to save Kyoto Protocol", *The Daily Star*, 4 December 2011.

<sup>118</sup> John Vidal and Fiona Harvey, "Climate Deal Salvaged After Marathon Talks in Durban", *op. cit.*

flexibility and accommodation shown by all, we have shown our flexibility... we agree to adopt it,” she said.<sup>119</sup>

## 5. Role of Bangladesh

As one of the countries most vulnerable to climate change, Bangladesh aligned itself with the group of LDCs and small island countries. It urged for continuation of the second commitment period of the Kyoto protocol and a legally binding outcome. As Minister for Environment and Forest Hasan Mahmud said, “We would like to see that Durban will, at least, secure the mandate to initiate dedicated discussion on a comprehensive legally binding instrument with robust compliance regime as soon as possible as agreed by parties.”<sup>120</sup> At the end of the conference Bangladesh’s reaction was modest. “We are not happy, but not frustrated either as it saved the Kyoto protocol,” the environment minister said, adding that Bangladesh expected much more from the conference. He also warned “It will be too late if we have to wait till 2020 to implement the legally binding document and cap the temperature rise within two degree Celsius.”<sup>121</sup>

In the Conference, Bangladesh made several proposals on Green Climate Fund (GCF) and Fast Track Fund (FTF). Major proposals were as follows: **First**, as the current operational FTF expires in 2012, donors should start contributing to the fund from 2013 to avoid any gap in climate financing. **Second**, 50 per cent of the GCF and FTF should be set aside for adaptation. Available information shows that only 19 per cent of FTF has gone to adaptation, which is vital for poor countries while the rest has gone to mitigation. **Third**, GCF and FTF must be additional to official development assistance and have the provision of direct access by the designated national authorities. There are allegations that many of the rich countries had diverted their regular foreign assistance in the name of Fast Track Fund. **Fourth**, GCF should function under the UNFCCC. This proposal was opposed to the US wish that it should be institutionalised under a separate body.<sup>122</sup> **Fifth**, a variety of public sources of funding

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<sup>119</sup> “UN charts new climate course”, *The Daily Star*, *op. cit.*

<sup>120</sup> “Time ticks away for thorny issues”, *The Daily Star*, 6 December 2011.

<sup>121</sup> “Durban not total failure”, *The Daily Star*, 14 December 2011.

<sup>122</sup> “Bangladesh pushes for green fund”, *The Daily Star*, 4 December 2011.

should form the core of GCF, with the private sector playing a supplementary role. This view too was opposed to that of the US. Some of these proposals had been accepted in the conference while uncertainty remains about the fate of others.

In short, Bangladesh appeared to be vocal on adaptation aspect but seemed to play passive role on mitigation aspect.

## **6. Assessment of the Conference**

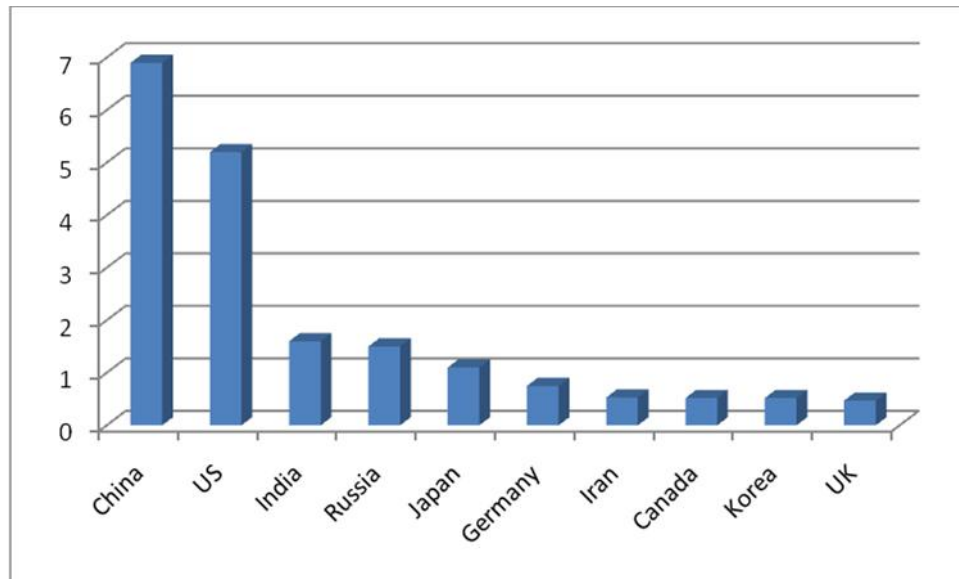
Views vary on the degree of success of the conference. To some analysts, the conference is an utter failure while others give it the credit of modest success. Subsequent paragraphs provide an assessment of the major issues related to the conference.

### **6.1. Continuation of the Kyoto Protocol**

Continuation of the Kyoto Protocol can hardly be depicted as a success of the summit. Figure 1 suggests why this continuation was not hailed at all. The Kyoto Protocol does not include China, US and India, the top three polluters of the world. Furthermore, Russia, Japan and Canada, countries ranking 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> in CO<sub>2</sub> emission, did not sign up for the second commitment period of the protocol. The EU which contributes only 14 per cent of global emissions has signed up for second commitment period. Hence, this second round of the Kyoto Protocol has very little scope to contribute in mitigation of global emissions. And, this little scope too cannot be identified as a success of the Conference as the EU had already planned to reduce European greenhouse-gas emissions by 20 per cent by 2020 over 1990 levels. Through signing up the second commitment period, the EU actually translated its domestic plan into the UN framework.

Figure 1: Top Ten CO<sub>2</sub> Emitting Countries, 2009 (in billion tons)

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Source: International Energy Agency, *CO<sub>2</sub> Emissions from Fuel Combustion Highlights*, 2011.

But, even if the Kyoto Protocol would have been signed by all its Parties for 2<sup>nd</sup> commitment period, could it bring much difference in the climate change scenario? Perhaps, it could not. Besides exclusion of three presently top polluters, the protocol suffers from several fundamental flaws. **First**, there is no penalty in the Protocol for a country that ratifies the Protocol but fails to meet its reduction targets. Furthermore, any country can withdraw from the treaty after ratifying it by simply giving one year's notice. This part of the treaty is harshly criticised by scientific community as it makes the treaty something that need not to be taken seriously.<sup>123</sup> Events in COP 17 has proved this criticism to be true. **Second**, even if the protocol would have been implemented with 100 per cent effectiveness, it had very little scope to improve the climate change scenario. The Kyoto Protocol aims to reduce emissions from industrialised nations only by around 5 per cent while Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) declares that a drastic 60 to 80 per cent reduction is necessary just to slow the process of climate change to an acceptable

<sup>123</sup>Eric Bond, "Climate Change and Kyoto Protocol", available at:

<http://climatechange.sea.ca/index.html>, accessed on: 02 January 2012.

rate that would allow ecosystems to adapt.<sup>124</sup> **Third**, the loopholes created by ‘flexible’ Kyoto mechanisms – Emission Trading (ET), Joint Implementation (JI) and Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) – have made the whole treaty meaningless. These flexible mechanism, on one hand, guarantees business as usual or even more profit for the polluters; on the other hand, they give birth to dubious projects which generate huge profit but save little carbon.

## 6.2. The Durban Platform

According to the Durban Platform, a global climate treaty will be drafted within 2015 and the treaty will come into effect by 2020. Some consider the deadline to be relatively quick by international standards, while others criticised that it has let the top emitter countries off the hook for another 8 years which implies failure to bring the planet on the safe track of 2.0 degree Celsius.<sup>125</sup> Scientists say that if global temperature rises more than 2.0 degree Celcius above pre-industrial levels, climate change becomes catastrophic and irreversible.

“Right now the global climate regime amounts to nothing more than a voluntary deal that’s put off for a decade”, said Greenpeace director Kumi Naidoo.<sup>126</sup> What is its implication? According to the United Nations environment programme, countries’ current emissions pledges would collectively mean that global annual emissions of Green House Gases would be about 50 billion tonnes in 2020. But to have a 50-50 chance of avoiding global warming over 2.0 degree Celsius, scientists estimate that global annual emissions would need to fall to about 44 billion tonnes in 2020, to less than 35 billion tonnes in 2030 and less than 20 billion tonnes in 2050.<sup>127</sup> Even those who are optimistic about the Durban Platform, agree that “it does not divert the world from the dangerous path towards a 4.0 degree Celcius temperature rise on which we are now walking.”<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>125</sup> Barrister Harun ur Rashid, “Durban Climate Conference: Who Won?”, *The Daily Star*, 14 December 2011.

<sup>126</sup> “UN charts new climate course”, *The Daily Star*, *op. cit.*

<sup>127</sup> “Durban deal will not avert catastrophic climate change, say scientists”, *The Guardian*, 11 December 2011.

<sup>128</sup> See, Michael Jacobs, “Hope at last at the Durban Conference on climate change”, *The Guardian*, 11 December 2011.

Thus the timeframe suggested in Durban Platform contradicts with the goal it has set - keeping global temperature rise within 1.5 or 2.0 degree celcius.

The last hour compromise made the language of the Durban Platform vague. At COP 17 the Parties agreed to establish an Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (AWG-DP) which has been given the mandate to develop “a protocol, another legal instrument or an agreed outcome with legal force under the Convention applicable to all Parties”. Among the three options, the third one is the least clear as it uses language that does not appear in the Convention. While, out of context, many would like to interpret ‘legal force’ as being the equivalent to ‘legally binding’, others observe that the AWG-DP mandate does not reflect an explicit agreement that ‘actions’ set out in the agreement will be legally binding.<sup>129</sup> Rather, the words ‘agreed outcome with legal force’ seems to signal something different and softer, than a legal instrument ratification. Given the context of the conference, it is not irrational to suspect that the countries that have resisted calls for a legally binding agreement might use this third option to lead to an outcome that is not conventionally viewed as legally binding.

More importantly, the platform had left all difficult questions to be resolved later on. Observers say that the talks for the 2015 pact will be arduous. Most thorny issues are determining the agreement’s exact legal status and apportioning carbon constraints among rich and poor countries. The task of apportioning carbon cuts will be much complicated as it will have to take into account several issues. **First**, historic emissions – industrialised countries started burning fossil fuels earlier and so bear responsibility for most of the CO<sub>2</sub> already in the atmosphere. **Second**, despite same responsibility in historic emission, all countries cannot be treated equally because later on some countries have taken more efforts to reduce emissions than others. **Third**, countries with large forests might claim that they provide a valuable service in absorbing Carbon and may want this to be taken into account.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Jacob Werksman, “Q & A: The Legal Aspects of the Durban Platform Text”, available at: <http://insights.wri.org/news/2011/12/qa-legal-aspects-durban-platform-text>, accessed on: 28 December 2011.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*



Another contentious issue is the provision to enforce penalties against those who fail to keep their commitment. The Kyoto Protocol had no such provision which had allowed Canada to miss its target massively and with impunity. Unless penalties for failure are included in the future regime, it is hard to imagine how it would apply force. Harder is to imagine that countries like the US, China and India will agree to such provisions.<sup>131</sup> Greenpeace has already alleged, "...the blockers lead by the US have succeeded in inserting a vital get-out clause that could easily prevent the next big climate deal being legally binding."

This is why David Symons, director of environmental consultancy WSP, reminds "No one should underestimate the difficulty of arriving at a legal agreement between the developed and developing countries, let alone one that for the first time includes China, India, Europe and America."<sup>132</sup> He also reminds about another issue that can make the task of reaching the deal uncertain. "Many political agreements put off the difficult actions for the next regime and that appears to be the reality for the Durban platform," he adds.<sup>133</sup>

Uncertainly also remains about Green Climate Fund. Climate vulnerable countries like Bangladesh are insisting on immediate operationalisation of the fund. But the Durban summit could not reach decision on how the money would be spent, who would administer the fund and from where (public or private sources) the money would come from. Hence climate vulnerable LDCs have to wait to get assistance, or in other words compensation, from that fund while the climate change would not wait to take its toll.

### **6.3. Role of Different Countries**

Quite reasonably, the issue of climate change is not out of the influence of global politics. The history of UN climate negotiations proves how much integrated the issue of climate change is to global politics. Following paragraphs provides an assessment of the role of different countries and blocks in UN climate negotiations including COP 17.

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<sup>131</sup> "A deal in Durban", *The Economist*, *op. cit.*

<sup>132</sup> "Durban Climate Conference agrees deal to do a deal: now comes the harder part", *The Guardian*, *op.cit.*

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*

### ***The US and Other Major Polluters***

In the context of global politico-economic scenario, it is not surprising that the US has always been the greatest obstacle in the global fight against climate change. Annex 1 provides some examples of it. In the very beginning, the US has watered down the UNFCCC by posing the threat that it would not join the Earth summit if there was any binding commitment. Later on, it incorporated the flexible mechanisms in the Kyoto Protocol which have made it toothless. This time too, the country threatened that it would not ratify the Protocol if the flexible mechanisms were not incorporated. But they did not ratify it at last even though the mechanisms were adopted.

Brian Tokar, Director of the Institute for Social Ecology, has nicely summarised the role of the US in recent UN climate negotiations. He observes, “[a]fter the 2007 climate summit in Bali, Indonesia, the Bush administration tried to initiate an alternate track of negotiations on climate policy that involved only a select handful of the more compliant countries... the Obama administration has adopted essentially the same approach, with the full collaboration of the “BASICS,” the utterly substanceless “Copenhagen Accord” can be seen as this coercive strategy’s first diplomatic success.”<sup>134</sup> He further argues, “the US had planned for some months to attempt to replace the quaint notion of a comprehensive global climate agreement with a patchwork of informal, individual country commitments... Nothing is binding, and everything is voluntary, only to be “assessed” informally after another five years have passed...The US, of course, has always tried to undermine the United Nations when it couldn't overtly control it...”<sup>135</sup>

Thus the US, on one hand, has rejected so far to join any binding commitment; and on the other hand, it has been jeopardising the UN climate negotiations in various ways: first, by replacing a multilateral and comprehensive negotiation process with an informal one involving only a select handful of countries; and second, by establishing an evil nexus among the polluter countries, both developed and developing. All these were again manifested in the events in COP 17: US’s denial to be a party

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<sup>134</sup> Brian Tokar, “[What Was Really Decided in Copenhagen?](http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/tokar241209.html)” available at: [mrzine.monthlyreview.org/tokar241209.html](http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/tokar241209.html), accessed on: 30 December 2011.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*

to the Kyoto Protocol and conditioned support<sup>136</sup> to legally binding agreement; Russia, Japan and Canada's denial to sign up for second commitment period; US's advocacy for the non-binding approach introduced in Copenhagen; and conspiracy-like impasse on the issue of responsibility of developing countries like China and India.

Sunita Narain, Director of India based Centre for Science and Environment, summarises the US led climate politics as follows: "The US has provided a perfect formula – it promises us the right to pollute, because it wants to legitimise its own pollution. As a powerful conspirator this will mean that we need to do little ourselves..." On climate finance she comments: "... The other proposition is equally seductive. To the countries, which are not yet polluters (from Ethiopia to Maldives), the Copenhagen Accord says we will give money to keep you pliant and agreeable."<sup>137</sup>

### ***The EU***

Many appreciate the role of the EU in UN climate negotiations. Nevertheless, it is not out of criticism. Some observe that one major reason behind European Union's firm support for the Kyoto Protocol was lack of access to their own low-cost sources of fossil fuel. According to them, setting aside environmental considerations, the EU see economic advantages for themselves if the Protocol were put into effect.<sup>138</sup> The EU's dubious role in incorporating the flexible mechanisms in the Kyoto Protocol can be recalled in this connection (See, Annex I). Others explain that despite common economic structure, the EU's response to climate change is different from the US and alike. One reason of this, they argue, is that environment consciousness is much stronger in the EU. A recent press release of Greenpeace informs: "According to the latest Eurobarometer opinion poll released in October 2011 the concern about climate change among Europeans has grown since 2009 and almost eight

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<sup>136</sup> US said that it would sign up such a binding agreement only if it includes major developing countries like India and China.

<sup>137</sup> Patrick Bond, *Politics of Climate Justice: Paralysis Above Movement Below*, South Africa: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press, 2012, p. 28.

<sup>138</sup> Eric Bond, "Climate Change and Kyoto Protocol", *op. cit.*

in ten respondents agree that tackling climate change can boost the economy and create jobs”.<sup>139</sup>

The role of the EU in bargaining the new climate regime in COP 17 is appreciated by many while others view the EU led negotiation as developed countries’ attempt to shift their burden of cutting global emissions on to developing countries which violates the principle of “common but differentiated responsibility” of UNFCCC.<sup>140</sup>

### **ALBA**

This left-leaning, small but vocal bloc of Latin American countries has shown the prospect to make a difference in climate negotiations. In recent years ALBA has vigorously taken up the cause of climate justice. It was the resistance from ALBA countries which has prevented the Copenhagen Accord from being ‘adopted’. Naturally such stance of ALBA is detested by the US. According to secret diplomatic cables released by WikiLeaks, American diplomats sought to “neutralise, co-opt or marginalise” radical Latin American nations which were advocating deeper cuts in carbon emissions.<sup>141</sup> The role of ALBA is not liked by the EU also. Britain’s climate secretary Ed Miliband accused ALBA countries of “hijacking UN climate talks”.<sup>142</sup> Interpreting in other way, “hijacking UN climate talks” reflects the strength of ALBA in making a difference in UN climate negotiations. Still, it is too early to predict whether and how this strength would contribute in bringing a real solution to climate change.

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<sup>139</sup> “Polluticians occupy the climate”, press release of Greenpeace, 23 November 2011.

<sup>140</sup> Martin Khor, “Durban Battle on Climate Regime’s Future”, *TWN Durban News Update 13*, 05 December 2011, available at: [http://ifg.org/pdf/durban\\_update13.pdf](http://ifg.org/pdf/durban_update13.pdf), accessed on: 30 December 2011.

<sup>141</sup> Nikolas Kozloff, “Time for a new geopolitical climate bloc: Part I”, ALJAZEERA, available at <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/12/2011121213124688507.html> accessed on 05 January 2012.

<sup>142</sup> Nikolas Kozloff, “Time for a new geopolitical climate bloc: Part II”, ALJAZEERA, available at: <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2011/12/2011121393718974204.html>, accessed on: 05 January 2012.

## 7. Challenges for the Future

Previous discussion suggests that UN climate talks has turned to a ping pong game among the major polluter – developed polluter countries led by the US on one side and developing polluter countries led by China and India on the other. The former group claims that as some developing countries have become top polluters with China as the topmost, any treaty that excludes them is meaningless and would fail to keep the world on the safer track of 2.0 degree Celsius. On the other hand, the latter group reminds about the historical contribution of the developed countries in causing climate change. Both lines of arguments appear to be logical. But what is missing in both lines of thought is the absence of sense of liability to save the planet Earth and the very existence of human civilisation. What makes countries so naïve? The answer lies in the present global economic structure. The US, China and India – all are competing economies and fears that emission cutting measures will make them less competitive compared to others. “What some see as inaction is in fact a demonstration of the palpable failure of our current economic system to address economic, social or environmental crises,” said Janet Redman, of the Washington-based Institute for Policy Studies.<sup>143</sup> Thus, making the two polluter groups agree to sign and ratify a meaningful legally binding treaty in the present economic structure remains a great challenge of the day.

Another challenge is to make the future climate regime a meaningful one. There is no point in keeping the market based mechanisms similar to the Kyoto Protocol in the new climate regime; neither is it scientifically approved nor is it able to halt global warming.

The logic behind the Kyoto Mechanisms (Emission Trading, Joint Implementation and Clean Development Mechanism) is that the planet as a whole does not care where the reductions in emissions are achieved; simply that reduction is taking place is enough. Hence, by investing in a reduction project on the other side of the globe, a country is still contributing to its own reduction quota. But scientists challenge this notion of emission exchange. They say that Green House Gases are

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<sup>143</sup> “COP 17 ends: Earth, and Africa, still headed for disaster”, available at: <http://cop17insouthafrica.wordpress.com/>, accessed on: 19 January 2012.

complex and their rising production creates a non-linear impact which implies that a tonne of CO<sub>2</sub> produced in one place cannot be accommodated by reducing a tonne in another.<sup>144</sup>

Experience shows that in case of climate change, the idea of market solution to market failure (externalities) does not work well. Contrary to their aims, these market mechanisms create such an opportunity of profit for Green House Gas (GHG) emitting companies that they are increasing their production and thereby increasing pollution while still they are getting credit of emission reduction.<sup>145</sup> A Wall Street Journal editorial comments: “The emerging alliance of business and environmental special interests may well prove powerful enough to give us cap-and-trade in CO<sub>2</sub>... it would make money for some very large corporations. But don’t believe for a minute that this charade would do much about global warming.”<sup>146</sup> According to Newsweek magazine’s investigation of Third World carbon trading (through the Clean Development Mechanism), “It isn’t working . . . [and represents] a grossly inefficient way of cutting emissions in the developing world.” The magazine called the trade “a shell game” which has transferred “\$3 billion to some of the worst carbon polluters in the developing world.”<sup>147</sup>

Given the failure of the Kyoto Protocol, what can be the alternatives? Many analysts, from NASA Scientist [James E. Hansen](#) to Nobel laureate economist Joseph Stiglitz, advocate for another market based mechanism

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<sup>144</sup> Patrick Bond, *Politics of Climate Justice: Paralysis Above Movement Below*, *op. cit.*, p. 32.

<sup>145</sup> For a vivid example of how this is happening, see, Nick Davies, “Truth about Kyoto: huge profits, little carbon saved”, *The Guardian*, 02 June 2007, available at: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2007/jun/02/india.greenpolitics>, accessed on: 04 January 2012.

<sup>146</sup> Available at: <http://bigthink.com/age-of-engagement/when-big-business-gets-behind-cap-and-trade-the-wall-street-journal-suddenly-re-frames-its-position-around-standing-up-for-the-little-guy>, accessed on: 07 January 2012.

<sup>147</sup> Cited in Patrick Bond, “From False to Real Solutions for Climate Change”, available at: <http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2008/bond060108.html>, accessed on: 06 January 2012.

called carbon tax.<sup>148</sup> According to them, carbon tax would raise the cost of carbon-intensive products and thereby would encourage firms and households to keep their carbon footprints low. Other more extreme groups call for leaving fossil fuels in the ground and investing in appropriate energy-efficiency and safe, clean and community-led renewable energy. Patrick Bond observes: “In contrast to carbon trading, what is reverberating within grassroots, coalface, and fenceline struggles in many parts of the world is a very different strategy and demand by civil society activists: leave the oil in the soil, the resources in the ground.”<sup>149</sup> What would be the final strategy for global fight against climate change will be decided in the power struggle among different sections of polluters and sufferers; because at the end, climate change is not merely a issue of natural science, rather it is very closely linked to global economic and political structure.

## 8. Conclusion

The UN climate negotiation aimed at a global climate regime has achieved little success so far. The Durban Conference was no exception to this. On one hand, outcomes of the conference can hardly be depicted as a success. **First**, continuation of the Kyoto Protocol cannot be called a success of the summit as the protocol suffers from serious structural flaws. Furthermore, the second round of the protocol has negligible scope to contribute in mitigation of global emission. And, this negligible scope too is not a contribution of the conference as it actually translates EU’s domestic plan into the UN framework. **Second**, Durban Platform sets a goal of keeping global temperature rise within 1.5 or 2.0 degree celcius but the timeframe it suggests, contradicts with the goal. The last hour compromise made the language of the Durban Platform vague. More importantly, the platform had left all difficult questions to be resolved later on. **Third**, the conference could not resolve uncertainly over major issues regarding the Green Climate Fund.

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<sup>148</sup> See, “Experts: Carbon Tax needed and NOT Cap-and-Trade Emission Trading Scheme (ETS), Yarra Valley Climate Action Group”, available at: <http://sites.google.com/site/yarravalleyclimateactiongroup/carbon-tax-needed-not-cap-and-trade-emission-trading-scheme-ets>, accessed on: 07 January 2012.

<sup>149</sup> Patrick Bond, “From False to Real Solutions for Climate Change”, *op. cit.*

On the other hand, the Durban climate conference was another show of climate politics which has turned the UN climate talks into a ping pong game among the major polluters – developed polluter countries led by the US on one side and developing polluter countries led by China and India on the other.

Finally, it can be said that the ultimate solution of climate change will be determined by global climate politics, which in turn, depends on global economic and political structure.