



**Roundtable Discussion**  
**on**  
**Climate Change and Displacement: The Global Debate**  
**Wednesday, 28 January 2015**  
**Organised by**  
**Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS)**

**Summary Proceedings**



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a Roundtable Discussion on ‘Climate Change and Displacement: The Global Debate’ on 28 January 2015. Professor Walter Kaelin, Envoy of the Chairmanship of the Nansen Initiative presented the keynote paper. Mr Md Nurul Karim, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forests, Mr Mohammad Abdul Qayyum, National Project Director,

CDMP and Ms Farah Kabir, Country Director, Action Aid were present as discussants.

**Introductory Remarks**

**Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Chairman, Board of Governors, BIISS, mentioned that climate change, environmental degradation and their serious negative impacts on people’s lives



and livelihood have become major issues of concern for the international community in recent years. They are closely connected to the ongoing debates about socio-economic development, domestic and cross-border security and stability, food security, human security, public health, housing, so on and so forth. The issues are drawing two kinds of responses- preventive or mitigation and curative or adaptation. However, the line between the two is often very thin or non-existent. He added that Bangladesh is one of the most vulnerable countries in the world in terms of effects of climate change and global warming. He also noted that

the government has a very aggressive diplomatic effort leading the most climate vulnerable countries in the relevant regional and global discourses and dialogues.

Ambassador Ahmad also mentioned that some of the *displaced persons* do not necessarily leave the location of their settlement, while others move to new locations within the same country and yet others move across international borders. However they all need resettlement and rehabilitation as well as protection. He opined that international cooperation, in most cases, would range from immediate assistance in emergency rescue and relief efforts, medical efforts, resettling and rehabilitation efforts involving temporary shelters and subsequently permanent shelters and occupational or livelihood rehabilitation. He further added that there is also scope for international cooperation in these areas in terms of capacity building, sharing of knowhow and best practices as well as working towards establishing shared codes of conduct and norms. He opined that in case of any international cooperation, serious attention must be given to different requirements in different situations.

### Keynote Presentation



During the Keynote presentation on ‘Climate Change, Disasters and Displacement: The Nansen Initiative’, **Professor Walter Kaelin**, focused on climate change, disaster and human mobility from an international perspective. He mentioned that during 2010-2011, about 300,000 peoples crossed the border of Kenya, Ethiopia and Djibouti mainly because of famine of Somalia. In January 2010, due to earthquake in Haiti, many people were forced to cross the border from their home of origin to Dominican Republic. The United States provided shelter to many environment refugees. During 2008-2013 about 160 million people were displaced due to disasters averaging 27 million per year. This climate related disasters are flooding, storm surges, droughts etc. He also informed that the IPCC in its 5<sup>th</sup> Assessment report mentioned that situation will turn worse in coming days by the increased number of displaced people. The population of developing countries that lack the resources for planned migration will experience higher exposure to extreme weather events. Moreover climate change can indirectly increase risks of violent conflicts by amplifying well-documented drivers of these conflicts such as poverty and economic shocks. He mentioned that now-a-days conflicts in Africa are mainly caused by climate related issues. According to him, climate change and natural disasters can create various situations: sudden-onset disaster, slow-onset disaster, loss of state territory and

conflict. Hence the challenges are: humanitarian, human rights, CC adaptation, development and security.

Professor Kaelin also noted that there are some gaps among countries on climate change issue.



The gaps are conceptual, institutional, legal and financial. The Nansen Initiative, that is working in this regard, is based on the UNFCCC Cancun Adaptation Framework, para 14(f) and was founded in October 2012. Bangladesh is one of the steering group members of this initiative while others are: Norway, Switzerland, Australia, Costa Rica, Germany, Mexico and Philippines. The Nansen initiative follows a bottom-up approach starting from regional consultations and ends in follow up. He added that the lessons are: population movements are multi-causal: displacement “in the context of disasters” rather than “disaster-induced”, most movements are internal but some cross-border, dynamics are mainly regional, vary from region to region, and call for regional responses (role of regional organisations) and there remains need to integrate population movements into NAPs, DRR, and resilience strategies etc.

He further added that a comprehensive approach is required to mitigate the losses. The toolbox of a comprehensive approach is climate change mitigation, adaptation and disaster risk reduction, taking into account human mobility, cross-border admission for the displaced etc. He also discussed the global and regional initiatives at the conclusion of his presentation.

### **Discussion by the Designated Discussants**

Designated Discussant **Mr Md Nurul Karim**, Additional Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forest, stated that *internally displaced persons* (IDP) will be a major problem of Bangladesh



mainly because of sea level rise and salinity. There are 19 coastal districts in Bangladesh out of which 64 are prone to cyclones and storm surges. About twenty to twenty five million people of the coastal region will be displaced from their home of origin due to sea level rise. Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated countries of the world and the population density is much higher in the coastal areas. Hence if a chunk of Bangladesh’s land mass goes under water then it will have serious impact on the country. People would be

internally displaced and would eventually move to the big cities like Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna and Rajshahi. Although the country is not currently facing the problem of trans-boundary migration, due to sea-level rise, a chunk of land may be lost which may cause displacement of people.

He also mentioned that nobody wants to migrate from their home of origin but if someone lose everything then he or she are forced to migrate. In Bangladesh, the people living in the coastal districts are resilient community. Therefore, Bangladesh has become able to reduce the losses of lives and livelihoods from the natural disasters. Over the years, Bangladesh has also increased its adaptation capacity to a new height. The COP 20 held at Lima also acknowledged the loss and damage issue, in which Bangladesh was very vocal. However, Bangladesh needs to have its share of Green Climate Fund which will assist in its capability building.

Another discussant, **Mr Mohammad Abdul Qayyum**, National Project Director, CDMP



remarked on the initiatives of the government of Bangladesh and stated that the country welcomes the Nansen initiative since it would help to add Bangladesh's voice nationally, regionally and globally. The unspoken miserable condition of coastline, people living in drought-prone areas and on the river banks will help the decision makers to picture a situation that will be reflected in future document. He further informed that the IPCC report states, in Bangladesh, climate induced displacement is a reality and one out of seven in Bangladesh

would be displaced by 2050, or might be before that, depending on the frequency and intensity of rapid-onset or slow-onset disasters like salinity intrusion, increased drought situation and riverbank erosion.

While discussion the global debate relating to humanitarian aspect, he mentioned that, the debates were confined to recovery and legal connotation of the terms like refugees or environmental refugees or internal displacement. This definition is not sufficient to define the present situation prevailing in the climate change discourse and practitioners and policy makers must come to a conclusion in this regard. He also discussed about the debate over whether the crisis is local or global. Some schools of thought consider it as a local crisis and as outcome of someone's strategy. Others try to look into it as originating from global causes, why these causes are being created and how to respond to that situation.

Mr Qayyum appreciated that the government of Bangladesh is spending 2.5 per cent of the GDP to protecting these people. He further discussed about the debate relating to the adequacy of policy and institutions. He mentioned that a framework is necessary to contain the sufferings of the millions who are purely innocent victim of the circumstances. Since Nansen initiative has been developed on this it is necessary to set the standard of protecting the people but this is question of protecting the livelihood of millions of people. The intensity of disaster puts forward the question that how far national government would be able to protect the citizens and, bearing this in mind, global, regional and national support would be required.

He noted that human rights have legal complexity and there remains wider gap, therefore, it is high time to find out how the needs and rights of the displaced people would be best addressed. With the development casket Bangladesh has, it should not forget that there are other people responsible for these occurring. These people should take responsibility of directing development to people. It is time to consider whether the data available for modeling is sufficient or not. Most importantly, Bangladesh needs to develop its own modeling. He noted that the parliament has

already passed an act and institutional reforms are already been made to shift responsibilities from relief management ministry to disaster management ministry. Therefore, legal and policy issues are being changed. CDMP is helping ministries to redesign developmental activities taking into consideration the impact of climate change on violence, agriculture, water supply, education etc. Government is emphasising more on community resilience, bottom-up approach, and participatory approach as well as identify the originating and destination zones of mobility and emerging disaster in destination places like unplanned urbanisation.

Another panelist, **Ms Farah Kabir**, Country Director, Action Aid discussed the gendered dimension of climate induced migration. She mentioned that it is necessary to get out of the debate and focus on the issue of attribution. She explained that people who are displaced do not care about the definition of climate induced displacement. Bangladesh has had river erosion for years but in recent times the frequency and intensity has changed. Therefore these factors must be taken into consideration. There is lack of discussion and policies to cover displacement. Citing her experiences of field visits, she mentioned that, the displaced people have categorically articulated that they do not want to be listed as refugees. They do not desire to leave their land, religion, community and belongings.



She concentrated on the problems the displaced people would face if shifted to a different cultural and environmental context. Since climate change is a man made phenomenon, mitigation should be high on the agenda. Negotiation on climate change and human rights issue should consider these and reflect on where the issue of the displaced people should come into discussion. More research and data on the displaced people is certainly needed for better understanding and better planning. She insisted on the necessity to look for long term solutions rather than short term management of problems. Displaced person neither wants to be refugees nor reside in camps. Participation of women and children in the discussion is significant since they are more vulnerable. Gender dimension in the conversation, negotiation and dialogue is therefore crucial. Temporary placement is necessary in certain circumstances and, in this regard, opening up of countries is critical to have international cooperation. Level of mitigation has not come down while the temperature has risen beyond 3 degrees. It is time to push all the mechanism that has been in the making. She finally expressed hope that the negotiation in April 2015 will ensure a better place for minorities, women and children and would offer something 'out of the box'.

### **Open Discussion**

**M Mokammel Haque**, Executive Chairman, Board of Investment, informed that he had coordinated the disaster management initiative at the Bangladesh level for the 1970s cyclone at the Bhola subdivision and Patuakhali district under the divisional commissioner. Drawing on his experiences, he informed that in that cyclone, alone in Bhola, more than a quarter of a million had died. He noted that the then government provided a little support to help the victims whilst international assistance was satisfactory. He opined that Bangladesh has a lot share with the world with regard to management of disaster. After the cycle of 1991 focus was changed from relief and rehabilitation to disaster management. He focused on the question of resilience and

cultural dimension which are not taken into consideration. All focus remains on the number of people. He noted that Bangladesh has a population pressure which the rest of the world taken together cannot take and posed the question that while capital, and rules and regulations can freely travel why people will not travel.



**Dr Mahfuz Kabir**, Senior Research Fellow, BISS questioned that since it is poor and vulnerable group who would be affected by global climate change and since the 2010-2015 disaster management plans involves only unified perspectives, is there any new dimension coming up in coordination with this in the next disaster management plan?

**Nizam Khan**, Professor of Environmental Management, North South University talked about UN convention on Displacement and refugees and noted that production as an issue and asked whether in near future any related UN provisions would be developed to address this sector of displacement. He mentioned that three Security Council meeting has already been held on this issue in 2007, 2011 and 2013. Therefore, would Security Council come in a big way to address the issue of climate induced displacement?

**Major General Amsa Amin (Retd.)** noted that in the global debate on displacement, a holistic approach is taken. But Bangladesh is a country with complexities and thus necessities of all kinds of approaches must be kept in mind. Not only climate change, there are problems of Rohingyas, Ex-Pakistanis, minorities and migration caused by economic reasons which affect displacement and should be included in the global debate. He also noted that issues like urbanisation, internal and external migration from Dhaka city affects the livelihood of human which has both national and regional implication. Therefore, any discussion of displacement at the international level should take these aspects into consideration.

**Muhammad Atikul Haque**, Center for Participatory Research and Development (CPRD) flagged two points. He mentioned that climate change induced displacement has just started and therefore the future climate change displacement would see much larger figure and more ferocity. It is said that the number would be 300 million plus by the end of the century. Therefore is it possible to relate this with any of the existing displacement to climate induced? If not, then, there would be difficulties to establish causal linkages. The report of IPCC categorically informed that impacts are going to be far more serious. Therefore causal linkages would have to be established. He also noted that researches show that people in Bangladesh do not want to leave their residence rather prefers to shift to nearest areas mainly. The final issue, he talked about, is the causal responsibility. A person who has been displaced will have the right to choose where to go. It is part of human right. Consequently, UNFCCC is not a mechanism that can handle these huge responsibilities. So this might be taken for future considerations.

**Ambassador M Afsarul Qader** observed that the Nansen Initiative is basically confined on effects. It has addressed the debate of the term refugees by using the term displacement. Here the main element seems to be absence of the element of persecution. Whatever be the cause scientific, economic or political, the effect remains the same: large number of people losing their security and home which is in no sense less than the impact of persecution. The most important point is this is happening without their immediate participation. Thus Nansen initiative should also focus on the definitional and legal problems.

**Rear Admiral Md Khurshed Alam (Retd)**, Secretary, Maritime Affairs Unit, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, opined that in South Asian context regional approach is required to combat against climate change. Some standards are already set on regional resilience strategy so that Bangladesh can move forward. He also added that cross border cooperation should be strengthened.



**M Zakir Hossain Khan** of Transparency International Bangladesh (TIB) mentioned that the responsibility of migration should be given to the people who face the problems. He hoped that the Nansen Initiative in this issue should have a guideline. Although the issue is addressed by the Paris Protocol, the Nansen Initiative has the scope to work much extensively on this issue. But there should be coordination with UNFCCC and other global process. His second point was about the identification of real victims as it is important for giving them assistances and rehabilitation. He added that the Green Climate Fund (GCF) mainly focuses on fund allocation but the amount of money allocated for the displaced people should also be mentioned there.

**Major General Jiban Kanai Das (Retd)**, Former Director General of BISS, noted that the number of elderly population is not negligible in Bangladesh and they are vulnerable segment of the society. Therefore he suggested that the elderly population also should be included in rehabilitation process.

While responding **Professor Walter Kaelin** noted that international law does not cover the issue of displaced people who crosses the border due to the climate change. So, it becomes difficult to provide them same treatment like a refugee. In Horns of Africa countries have reached on an agreement to provide supports to the environmental refugees basing on three elements: the people are in life threatening situation, the authority of the country is unable to address their needs and there is no solution within their own country. About the bottom up approaches, he mentioned that the approach is yet to be implemented. The regions are different from each other

so it is really difficult to adopt a global approach. So it is more realistic to look at domestic and regional mechanisms. He mentioned that responsibility of adopting a regional policy solely depends upon the regional countries. Latin American countries are trying to adopt a common policy and primary dialogue has already started. In the Pacific region countries have also started discussion. He added that it is necessary to consider social values and cultures while adopting any policy. Migration may create win-win situation for both sending and receiving countries, therefore, one should adopt a comprehensive approach.

Professor Kaelin also noted that International Organisation for Migration (IOM) is promoting the idea that climate change migration which may bring win-win outcomes. According to him the issue of creating a different entity for climate migrants is still debatable. It is also difficult to distinguish between humanitarian and legal perspective of migration. He also admitted that vulnerable people should be included in the discussion.

Designated discussant **Mr Mohammad Abdul Qayyum** noted that it is a bigger version of microcredit which may be another solution beside the market based system. But there is a problem with the victims of the climate change as the frequency of the calamities is very alarming and the people are losing their assets and income. Therefore, Micro-crop initiative is going on in Bangladesh as pilot project as well as the insurance mechanism. But lots of experiment is needed to find a sound mechanism to protect the victims. But one has to wait to view the result of pilot mechanism.

Another discussant **Ms Farah Kabir** stressed on mind change, as the existing framework be it legal, political or institutional are not capable to address the problem of displacement. She mentioned that some attributes can be set to define climate change displacement. She also pronounced about the necessity of more right based approach to address the issue. She opined that Bangladesh needs to have initiatives like UNFCCC in global level and in terms of regional conversation she urged to view the displacement issue more extensively and urged to put more focus on victims.

### **Concluding Remarks**

**Mr Md Shahidul Haque, Foreign Secretary, Government of People's Republic of Bangladesh**



Mr Haque opened up informing that the whole issue is still state-centric and would remain so in near future especially in the absence of alternatives. He discussed about a global research (2010) that was conducted by Gallup World Poll in 150 countries. Title of their report was 'The Many Faces of Global Migration'. There they tried to find out reasons of people's movement and identify why in the next couple of years they would move? Almost 500 people said they would have to move their current place of residence because of climate and environmental reasons. Thus the problem is real and not futuristic. The debate of mobility and migration within climate change is a marginal issue. This debate of migration and climate change

centering on mobility has emerged through the scientist and environmentalists; not the migration experts.

He focused on distinctions both in thought process and outcome like looking at mobility from a climate change angle or mobility from migration angle. He informed that, in the two-day conference centering on climate change and human rights, Bangladesh, tried to promote human-rights based approach of climate change migration and mobility. The debate on climate change centering on mobility started back in mid-1980s. During this time, there was a report of UNEP that talk about how people are getting into risky situation because of climate change. In Cancun 2010 Bangladesh had a contribution in terms of forcefully putting the discussion forward in terms of migration due to climatic conditions. So, in this discussion there was this all agreed consensus. Bangladesh continues to play an important role both from Foreign Office and the Ministry of Environment.

With regard to the Post-2015 development discourse, he referred the whole issue of sustainable development and its seventeen goals. Within the goals, climate change and displacement is a marginal issue. He noted that one cannot tackle the development issue unless climate change concerns are addressed. Therefore, there remains chances that when the indicators would be identified climate change displacement could get in since the indicators would be decided by individual countries. Bangladesh has rights and authorities to decide its indicators and within the indicator Bangladesh can place in climate induced migration for its development planning.

He further informed that ‘The Future We Want’, the Rio+20 documents also marginally dealt with displacement. States may have reluctance to accept the word ‘displacement’ which is not so for the word ‘migration’. In Geneva, in a discussion centering on SDGs, back in December, the Secretary General also noted that displacement is now at the highest level since World War II. However, there is nothing to address these displacements in post 2015 agenda as of now. There is a document currently negotiated in which Bangladesh made a strong intervention about not only in terms of keeping migration where it noted that migration and adaptation issue in disaster management context but also keeping disaster management issue in having an intervention, programmes and prospect.

Mr Haque noted that migration is no longer an issue of debate, it is now a reality. Therefore, even if five people are displaced, it is a matter to be addressed. The UK in 2009 came out with a report that the debate of climate change and mobility is no longer there. It came out with a very thematic diagram in terms of where climate change impacts mobility and when people eventually decide to move or not to move.

In terms of decision-making, what matters is mindset, culture and network. This also decides the outcome. Therefore, it is much more complex than climate change negotiation. In Bangladesh, one should not anymore nurture the idea of the debate. The European Union mooted the idea that climate change is a security issue because of migration, not because of climate change. Climate change will cause lots of people to cross border threatening state security. This concept came under criticism because analysts argued that this is how the concept of migration is securitised. Though there has been enough discussion in the Security Council linking climate change and security, there has not been much follow up. IPCC’s 5<sup>th</sup> assessment report put the issue of migration under human security. In case of a climate shock, the person who cannot move and have the capacity to move generally gets trapped. The coastal zone of Bangladesh is one of the

examples. Their capacity has to be enhanced in terms of mobility. Being trapped is not an option for population and there it has taken a new shape. Are we going to keep a population trapped in a risky situation where they would die eventually? This is not an option. Migration can also be an effective adaptation strategy. He noted the multi-causal nature of the problem. Bangladesh has a confidence in the UN mechanism and have to work within the mechanism to bring in changes.

### **Vote of Thanks by the Chair**

At conclusion **Ambassador Munshi Faiz Ahmad**, Chairman, Board of Governors, BISS, delivered vote of thanks. He extended his special thanks and gratitude to the Key Note Presenter, Professor Walter Kaelin, Envoy of the Chairmanship of the Nansen Initiative, for sharing his valuable thoughts on climate change and displacement issues. He also extended special thanks to the Honourable Foreign Secretary for taking time out from his busy schedule and helping to round up the discussion with his valuable words. He also expressed his sincere gratefulness to the designated discussants as well as senior civil-military officials, including former officials, members of academia, representatives of think-tanks and the media for attending and actively participating in the programmed. He also extended sincere thanks to everyone else, including the delegates of Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the officers and staff of BISS, who have worked hard to make all arrangements for successfully hosting the Round Table discussion.