



Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies
1/46, Old Elephant Road, Eskaton, Dhaka-1000

Panel Discussion

on

RIO + 20 CONFERENCE: OUTCOME AND WAY FORWARD

Organised by BIISS on 01 August 2012

SUMMARY OF THE PROCEEDINGS

The Bangladesh Institute of International and Strategic Studies (BIISS) organised a **Panel Discussion** on “**Rio+20 Conference: Ways and Outcome**” at the BIISS Auditorium on Wednesday, 01 August 2012. **Major General Muhammad Imrul Quayes**, ndc, psc, Director General of BIISS chaired the session and delivered the Address of Welcome. **Dr. Hasan Mahmud**, MP, Hon’ble Minister, Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF), Government of the People’s Republic of Bangladesh graced the occasion as Chief Guest.

The panelists were: Dr. Atiur Rahman, Governor, Bangladesh Bank, Professor Ainun Nishat, Vice Chancellor, BRAC University, Dr. Atiq Rahman, Executive Director, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies (BCAS) and Mr. Quamrul Islam Chowdhury, Chairman, The Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh and Asia Pacific Forum of Environmental Journalists.

Following the discussion by the panelists, a lively Open Discussion session took place where distinguished scholars, members of the academia, representatives of multi-disciplinary professional bodies, representatives from the foreign missions, government and non-government agencies and policy makers actively participated, raised questions, and gave their valuable comments, suggestions, and recommendations regarding how Bangladesh can make itself more capable in the international climate change negotiation.

Address of Welcome

Major General Muhammad Imrul Quayes, ndc, psc, in his Address of Welcome gave a brief background about the Rio+20 Conference and stated that from 20-22 June 2012, the UN organised the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) at Rio de Janeiro in Brazil in which 191 UN member states including 86 Presidents and Heads of the governments actively participated. The Conference, however, marks the 20th anniversary of the 1992 Earth Summit held at the same city of Brazil and therefore, it has been shortly named as Rio+ 20. In addition, the Conference marks the 10th anniversary of the 2002 World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg. He further clarified that in the 1992 Earth Summit, the countries adopted Agenda 21, a blue print, to rethink the ways of economic growth with a view to advance social equity and environmental protection. After 20 years, the UN has

again brought together governments, international institutions and major groups to agree on a range of measures that can reduce poverty while promoting sustainable development.

About Rio+20 Conference, Major General Quayes mentioned that the meeting mainly focused on two themes and seven priority areas. The themes are: (a) green economy in the context of sustainable development through poverty reduction; and (b) the institutional framework for sustainable development. The preferred areas are: decent jobs, energy, sustainable cities, food security and sustainable agriculture, water, oceans and disaster readiness. He also informed that the Conference resulted in a fifty page document called “The Future We Want” encompassed with 283 paragraphs and many other issues. In this regard, he talked about the statement of critics who viewed the document as a weak one with mainly ‘aspirations rather than decisions’ and it reflected the reluctance of the rich countries to agree to any concrete actions. Apart from these, the Director General focused on the two outcomes of the Conference which are mainly: (1) setting up a process by the UN Secretary General to develop a set of new Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) to replace Millennium Development Goals (MDG) and (2) taking decisions to allow and enable countries to put in place their own nationally driven processes towards a greener development pathway. Finally, with regard to the position of Bangladesh, he informed that a twenty member delegations participated in the Conference and raised the concerns of the country in respect to climate change.

Panel Discussion

Dr. Atiur Rahman informed that the conference reviewed commitment to sustainable development and to ensure promotion of economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future for the present and future generations. He further added that the major theme of commitment is the eradication of poverty which has been identified as the greatest global challenge presently. Hence, the need for further mainstreaming sustainable development at all levels integrating economic (e.g. inclusive and equitable growth), social (e.g. reducing inequalities and increasing the basic standard of living), and environmental (e.g. promoting the sustainable management of natural resources) aspects has been acknowledged to achieve sustainable development at all dimensions. Regarding key outcomes, he mentioned the adoption of the Rio outcome document, titled “The Future We Want” which is organised into six sections:

- I. Common vision (Para 1-13)
- II. Renewing political commitment (Para 14-55)
- III. Green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication (Para 56-74)
- IV. Institutional framework for sustainable development (Para 75-103)
- V. Framework for action and follow-up
- VI. Means of Implementation (Para 252-283)

In his presentation, Dr. Rahman also stated that the major objectives of Rio+20 Conference are to reinvigorate political will and to raise the level of commitment by the international community to move the sustainable development agenda forward, through achievement of the internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs); creation of good quality jobs by adopting forward looking macroeconomic policies that promote sustainable

development and lead to sustained, inclusive and equitable economic growth; and exploring opportunities and addressing challenges associated with demographic change including migration through forward looking planning.

In his view, a number of initiatives have been taken from Bangladesh side to go ahead. These are:

- Formulation of work plan for post Rio+20 Conference;
- Mainstreaming sustainable development in the development process with a well balanced integration of economic sustainability, social development and environmental sustainability;
- Participation in high level political forum;
- Formulation and implementation of sustainable development policy with full participatory approach;
- Taking effort for inclusion in the open working group and intergovernmental committee, take effort in obtaining compensation pledged at Rio+20
- Ensuring effective coordination and synergies among different agencies and organisations, and
- Promoting public participation through providing easy access to information regarding legislation, regulations, activities, policies and programmes.

According to Dr. Rahman, Bangladesh has high moral ground in Rio +20 and achieved a lot from the Conference. He stated that the country report is very inclusive and Bangladesh has been honoured by the UNDP's Equator Initiative for its outstanding contribution to sustainable development through partnership. Bangladesh also negotiated about the draft outcome document along with the G-77. Most of the issues, particularly green economy, raised by the country were accepted at the G-77 Group as a common stand of G-77 and eventually were reflected in the final outcome document.

The Governor also talked about the other events during the conference in which he participated. These are: "Rio+20 Corporate Sustainability Forum: A Changing World: Business as Usual", "Ensuring green development in the backdrop of rapidly changing climate" jointly organised by Bangladesh and Vietnam and "Building inclusive green economies: A new development partnership" organised by the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development, Germany. In these events, the Governor addressed a number of initiatives of Central Bank like issuing 'green banking' guidelines based on prior environmental appraisal of investment projects and joint green banking activities with Vietnam. He stated that the country was on high moral ground for committing itself to more inclusive green growth despite being the victim of climate change and climate change related high carbon growth in the developed world. He then urged the leaders of the developed world to come up with creative options for more meaningful international cooperation and transfer of resources and technologies for inclusive green growth. Finally, he added that the Central Bank of Bangladesh is socially responsible for sustainable development and it is currently working on agriculture, landless share croppers, SME (including women entrepreneurs), renewable energy, automation, paperless banking, as well as green banking for environmental risk management.

Professor Ainun Nishat said that negotiation process starts generally in the technical level and then it goes to ministerial and political level. Before starting the Rio+20 Conference, there were four Preparatory Committee Meetings. In the Preparatory Committee, the role of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) was weak. In this regard, Nepal was chairing LDCs and the country was not very active to represent those LDC countries. The reason is that, during the Conference, the organisation segregated the discussion into different venues, which are far from one another and it was difficult to connect the discussions held in different venues. On the other side, the NGOs were very prompt and they raised the issues regarding what has been really going on for the last twenty years in the name of sustainable development. They became very critical and proposed what should really be done. Professor Nishat commented that the Rio+20 Conference was essentially a review meeting. It reviewed the Agenda 21 of 1992, MDGs of 2000 and Rio+10 of 2002. He criticised the document produced in the Rio+20 Conference terming as a “biased document”. He also viewed that the document failed to determine any strong commitment for implementation of the decisions as it was expected that the Conference would determine the institutional process for the implementation and funding process. However, the success of the Conference was not remarkable. Despite that, the countries became successful to identify three pillars of sustainable development: socially sustainable, politically sustainable, and environmentally sustainable. He added that the developed countries are not interested to take sufficient responsibility for funding of the developing countries. Nevertheless, the developing countries want to ensure transparency, accountability, public-private partnership and inclusiveness in the process of the expenditure of the climate change expenditure fund.

Apart from these, he observed that Rio+20 Conference failed to understand the difference between “water management” and “water supply and sanitation”. He added that the role of Brazil was autocratic in this regard. Even, the total process was dominated by the BRICS countries and they did not show sufficient interest to listen to the concerns of the developing countries. Professor Nishat also felt that in future, the role of the civil society organisations would be important in this regard and the LDC countries have to be more equipped to fight for ensuring “preferential treatment for LDCs”. On the other hand, the competition between the United Nations Environmental Programme (UNEP) and United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to ensure strong relevance in the process of implementation of the decisions. He proposed that in the future Bangladesh should emphasise on eight issues: Food security, water security, energy security, livelihood security, health security, protection of basic human rights, gender equality and women empowerment, and protection of natural resources. Finally, he focused on the necessity of establishing a National Commission on Sustainable Development for Bangladesh to ensure the proper implementation of the sustainable development process.

Dr. Atiq Rahman highlighted that there are nine major groups in the global climate change negotiation including business people around the world, children and the youth, indigenous people, local authority which provide knowledge at the grass root levels, women workers and trade unions. However, the different groups were disappointed by the final document as they viewed that it did not reflect the expectations of the developing countries. From the government side, it was said that they have made some success, but the NGOs were not happy. According to Dr. Atiq, the global financial crisis has influenced the positions of the developed world. They are not sincere to help the developing countries for facing the challenges of climate change. He opined that many intellectual achievements are accomplished in the Conference which opened the ways for the developing countries to bargain in the climate change negotiation. The business

community has shown interest to develop eco-friendly technologies. He commented that the future challenges of climate change would be the challenge of governance. Therefore, the governance system has to be decentralised. The developed countries are already raising questions about the transparency of the developed world. He said that the Rio+20 Conference is not a document of commitment. The final decision would be made in the next UNGA Summit in September 2012. He suggested that innovative decisions can enhance development process in Bangladesh. Energy efficiency, safe drinking water for all, sustainable sanitation, food security and nutrition can strengthen sustainable development. He emphasised that the climate change strategy implementation mechanism has to be faster and deeper.

Mr. Quamrul Islam Choudhury said that the Conference had less expectation as it was in the Rio Summit of 1992. According to his view, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, enthusiasm was more than the present time for doing something for the world as the whole world is facing global meltdown. However, on the issue of climate change under the banner of G-77, 135 countries are trying to ensure their position in the international negotiations. He further added that the countries of G-77 are not always able to secure their same uniform position in the negotiation process. In addition, all the UN documents are developed in a process of two years intensive negotiations. Hence, there is a necessity of continuation of negotiations. He added that the LDCs are less represented in the Rio+20 Conference document. Earlier, China was always supporting the position of the LDCs, but nowadays, the country is not eager to support these countries. He further said that green growth would be for the interest of the LDCs. At the end, he recommended that Bangladesh government needs to develop a document engaging all the relevant organisations of the country at the government and non-governmental levels that would increase the capability of Bangladesh to make more effective negotiations in the international level.

Open Discussion

A lively open discussion session followed the presentations. **Dr. Mustafizur Rahman**, Chairman, The Institute of Development Strategy (IDS), asked about the total allocated fund for green economy and the interest rate for loans for this fund. He recommended that government policy of solar energy use would not be forced on the people; rather government has to increase awareness among the people that would give the issue universal acceptance to all. He focused that easy access to green technology has to be open for all classes of the society. Through this process, the desire of green economy would be achieved.

Dr. Mohammad Enamul Haq, Former IGP, and Member, Law Commission, said that the Rio+20 Conference stressed more on the theoretical aspects like the concepts of “well balanced economy”, “green economy” or “sustainable development”. But, discussion is required regarding the mode of monitoring these issues. He emphasised that policies of the government has to be practical in nature and has to be convenient for implementation.

Mr. Md. Sufiur Rahman Khan, Director General (MEA), MOFA, said that in comparison to other global negotiations, the Rio+20 Conference was more successful. Though the Conference only identified the goals for sustainable development, and it failed to formulate any detailed implementation mechanism. He added that the gap of technologies is a challenge for ensuring green economy. Hence, Bangladesh needs more clear idea about what green economy means and how it has to be achieved. He said that Bangladesh is facing a challenge of marginalisation.

Therefore, the country has to be more innovative to ensure its position in the negotiation process. The diplomatic instrument of Bangladesh has to be diversified and technical. The engagement of civil society and private sector is very essential. He added that Bangladesh has to set up a priority based mechanism to implement the process of sustainable development. He also focused on the importance of well-coordinated approach in the government and non-government levels.

Major General (Retd.) AAZ Amin Khan identified that increasing the number of population would be a challenge in the way of achieving sustainable development. He recommended that The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) can be a model for implementation mechanism of sustainable development goals. He pointed out that containment of deforestation is essential for the achievement of environmental protection.

Mr. Suhel A Choudhury, Former Commerce Secretary, focused that the continuation of the negotiation process is essential. He added that formation of an effective adaptation mechanism in the national levels is also important.

Major General (Retd.) Jiban Kanai Das, ndu, psc (Retd), Former Director General of BIISS, said that huge forestation in the whole country is very essential for saving people from different kinds of pollution. He expressed his concern that increasing food adulteration in the country have emerged as a development challenge for Bangladesh.

Ms. Farah Kabir, Action Aid, said that reproductive right of women has to be taken in the negotiation process to formulate an effective sustainable development process. She emphasised on the broader involvement of women in the total environmental negotiation and implementation process.

Professor Nasim Banu, Kustia University highlighted that for attaining sustainable development the importance of agriculture is pivotal. Hence, *Borga Chasis* should get sufficient loan from the government to ensure adequate agricultural production.

Ms. Saleha Sultana, Former Deputy Director of BIISS Library and Doc. recommended that government can use different roads of the city for forestation. She commented that for health security, the containment of pollution is essential.

While replying to the queries of the floor, **Dr. Ainun Nishat** emphasised that a coordination and combination of the national, regional and global policies of climate change adaptation is essential to ensure sustainable development. He proposed that the government should send some officials in the next negotiations, though the respected officials are posted to other sectors of the government. The initiative would certainly strengthen negotiation capability and ensure the continuity of the negotiations.

Dr. Atiur Rahman replied that Bangladesh Bank voluntarily formed a renewable energy fund for facilitating solar plantation, bio-gas plantation and other environment friendly activities. In addition, Bangladesh Bank already introduced Green Banking in the country.

Address by the Chief Guest

The Chief Guest in his Address agreed that Rio+20 Conference is simply a review meeting though it is expected that it would be a second Earth Summit. Like other panelists, he expressed

his concern that the Conference did not meet the expectations of the global community as it should have taken the bold decisions on sustainable development and green economy. Discussing on the overall success of the Conference, he said that the meeting was useful, though before Rio+20 Conference, most of the negotiations took place in New York where diplomats and environmentalists who have very good knowledge about environmental agenda were not present.

While explaining the expectation for Bangladesh from this Conference, he opined that it is the meeting to salvage the globe not particularly for Bangladesh. In his view, Bangladesh played an excellent role in the Conference and a very good team with NGOs, government as well as journalists took part in it. He added that Bangladesh published country report on sustainable development which very few countries did so. The country was one of the Vice Chair of the Conference and was allowed to preside over the inaugural session. Bangladesh also organised the side events where the role of Bangladeshi participants were very rewarding. About the issues of way forward, he informed that for next year General Assembly, Bangladesh has made some commitments and will go for action. The Hon'ble Minister also discussed the position of Bangladesh in the assembly and stated that Bangladesh is a country which is involved with the LDCs, and compare to all other developing countries, the country is well ahead especially in case of operating solar system. He further clarified that government decided in the cabinet to establish sustainable energy authority and as a part of that, it distributed 20 million energy bulbs free of cost to the people. Moreover, the country has produced 3-4 per cent of the total energy through green sources including hydroelectricity. Even, the solar system is working better and 20-30 thousand solar panels are helping to generate 70 megawatt electricity every year. The government is also refining the building code for getting new national electricity line from national grid. Furthermore, the country has long term sustainable plans and tries to implement that plans. About climate change, he discourses that it creates extra pressure to implement those sustainable development plans. Though, Bangladesh is the very first country among the developing countries which identified climate change as a security threat. He further added that the country has climate change trust fund as well as climate change resilience fund which are dedicated for speedier implementation of climate change action. Talking about tree plantation, he said that the venture is three times more than in the past. He shared the information that in 2010, 10 crore plants are planted which are 12 crore in this year. Even, the industrial pollution which was treated 25-30 per cent is now 75 per cent through Effluent treatment plant (ETP) which today. To maintain this, regular fine is introduced to penalise the polluters. About safe sanitation, the minister said that the country has made a lot and ensuring food security is a big success for the country despite having huge number of population in the country.

Recommendations from the Floor

- In future, Bangladesh should emphasise on eight issues: Food Security, Water Security, Energy Security, Livelihood Security, Health Security, Protection of basic human rights, Gender equality and women empowerment, and protection of natural resources;
- The necessity of establishing a National Commission on Sustainable Development for Bangladesh, to ensure proper implementation of the sustainable development process;

- The governance system has to be decentralised to ensure good governance;
- Innovative decisions are required to enhance development process in Bangladesh. Energy efficiency, safe drinking water for all, sustainable sanitation, food security and nutrition can strengthen sustainable development;
- Climate change strategy implementation mechanism has to be faster and deeper;
- Bangladesh government needs to develop a document engaging all the relevant organisations of the country at the government and non-governmental levels that would increase the capability of Bangladesh to make more effective negotiations in the international level.
- Government policy of solar energy use should not be forced on the people; rather government has to increase awareness among the people that would give the issue universal acceptance to all;
- Easy access to green technology has to be open for all classes of the society;
- The diplomatic instrument of Bangladesh has to be diversified and technical. The engagement of civil society and private sector is very essential;
- Bangladesh has to set up a priority based mechanism to implement the process of sustainable development. A well-coordinated approach in the government and non-government levels is required.