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LEADERSHIP AND LEGITIMACY: BANGLADESH'S CLIMATE DIPLOMACY THROUGH THE CLIMATE VULNERABLE FORUM'S LENS

Abstract

This paper analyses Bangladesh's leadership and credibility in the realm of global climate diplomacy by examining its role during its two terms of chairmanship in the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF). Bangladesh has become an important voice from the Global South, advocating for climate justice and adaptation despite having limited natural resources and a status of one of the world's most climate-vulnerable nations. Applying a framework of four types of leadership, including ideational, structural, directional, and instrumental, the paper examines how Bangladesh leveraged its credibility and domestic policy to influence international negotiations. It finds that Bangladesh's ideational leadership has been reflected in reshaping discussions on global narratives on vulnerability and resilience through initiatives such as "Climate Prosperity plan" which stands as the world's first strategic investment roadmap created by a CVF nation. Bangladesh established the climate financing tools within the CVF/V20 framework and initiated the creation of the CVF Trust Fund in partnership with UNDP which demonstrate its structural leadership. Dictionally, The country has shown directional leadership by implementing comprehensive internal adoption plan such as installing 6 million solar panel, while instrumental leadership is reflected in its attempt to forge stronger alliance with G77+ China, AOSIS, LDC group and SIDS to recover loss and damage funds. The findings suggest that Bangladesh's legitimacy arise from congruence of rhetoric and action acknowledged by its peer. The paper concludes that Bangladesh exemplifies a form of "weak power leadership," illustrating how moral and coalition-based influence can shape global climate governance.

Key Words: Climate Vulnerable Forum, Climate Justice, Climate Diplomacy, Loss and Damage, Weak Power, Global South, Leadership, Legitimacy.

1. Introduction

Bangladesh is among the nations most vulnerable to climate change due to its position in a low-lying delta and its susceptibility to severe weather events. By 2050, rising sea levels and erosion may result in the loss of around 15 per cent

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of Bangladesh's coastal territory causing internal displacement of about 25 million people.¹ These climatic challenges provide significant dangers to Bangladesh's socio-economic stability and national security.² The nation now experiences recurrent floods, cyclones, and saline intrusion, with 80 per cent of its land classified as susceptible to flooding.

Bangladesh has not remained idle in the face of its climate change vulnerabilities. In 2009, it became one of the first Least Developed Countries (LDCs) to develop a comprehensive Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan and establish a Climate Change Trust Fund from domestic resources.³ This showed the country's readiness to take initiatives on its own instead of waiting for external assistance despite constrained resources.⁴ The country has included the issue of protection of environment and biodiversity in the constitution by introducing Article 18A in the 15th Amendment in 2011.⁵ Over the past few decades, the government invested significantly in climate adaptation and disaster risk reduction programmes.⁶ This resulted in the dramatic decline in the number of deaths from cyclones making Bangladesh a model for climate resilience and disaster management.⁷

On the international stage, Bangladesh's vulnerability compelled it to pursue robust climate diplomacy. It joined the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in the very beginning and quickly became an advocate for the interests of climate-vulnerable nations.⁸ Despite being a small country with neither the geopolitical muscle nor emissions footprint like great powers, Bangladesh used coalition-building as its diplomatic trump card in climate negotiations. The CVF was inaugurated in 2009 to amplify the collective voice of vulnerable developing nations. Bangladesh served as the CVF's third chair from 2011 to 2013 and played a key role in institutionalising the forum's activities.⁹ Together with other least developed, small island, and African states, Bangladesh consistently pushed for some common

¹ Shiblee Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics: Focus on Climate Diplomacy," *Journal of Alternative Perspectives in the Social Sciences* 11, no. 3 (2022): 415-476.

² Shiblee Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics,"

³ Geoff Dabelko, "Basket Case or Test Case? Bangladesh as a Weak Power Climate Leader", *New Security Beat*, Wilson Center, last modified August 15, 2017, <https://www.newsecuritybeat.org/2017/08/basket-case-test-case-bangladesh-weak-power-climate-leader>.

⁴ Alice Baillat "Bangladesh as a Weak-Power Climate Leader," *Gobeshona 4 (ICCCAD)*, International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), <https://icccad.net/programmes/gobeshona/gobeshona4/bangladesh-as-a-weak-power-climate-leader/>

⁵ Geoff Dabelko, "Basket Case or Test Case?"

⁶ Shiblee Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics."

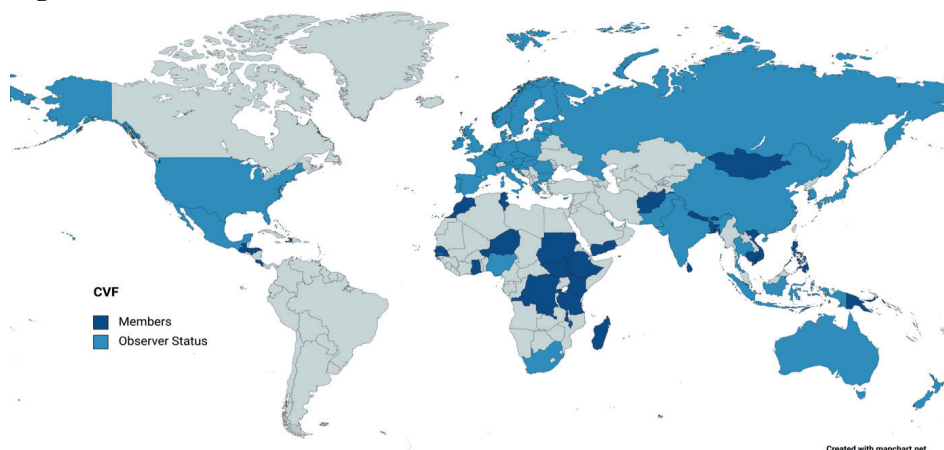
⁷ Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "Bangladesh as a Weak-Power Climate Leader."

⁸ UNFCCC Secretariat, *The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change Secretariat as an Orchestrator in Global Climate Policymaking* (Bonn: UNFCCC), <https://unfccc.int>

⁹ Climate Vulnerable Forum, *Bangladesh as Chair of Climate Vulnerable Nations' Forum Calls for Resilient Recovery* (Dhaka: Climate Vulnerable Forum, 2020), <https://thecvf.org>.

agendas in climate negotiations. Examples include the pursuit of more ambitious mitigation target of limiting warming to 1.5°C, and advocacy increased support for adaptation and loss-and-damage compensation from high-emitting developed countries.¹⁰ These efforts yielded result in the Paris Agreement (2015), which for the first time set a long-term goal of holding global temperature rise to 1.5 °C – a success widely credited in part to relentless advocacy by the CVF alliance, including Bangladesh.¹¹ At UNFCCC sessions, especially in the 48-nation LDC Group, contribution of Bangladeshi experts and negotiators were well acknowledged and they were frequently chosen to draft text on important issues or coordinate group positions.¹² For example, along with allies, Bangladeshi delegates were instrumental in introducing the then-new idea of “loss and damage” to the UNFCCC agenda. They played a crucial role in including loss and damage as a separate article (Article 8) in the Paris Agreement and establishing the Warsaw International Mechanism on Loss and Damage in 2013.¹³ These reflect how Bangladesh managed to shift its image from the quintessential climate change victim to a proactive leader and agenda-setter in global climate governance despite limited material resources.

Figure 1: CVF member and Observer Countries.



In the past, big countries or groups like the United States, the European Union, or developing countries that are liable for large scale emissions and at the same time are rich in capital and technical know-how have led discussions about

¹⁰ Mizan R. Khan, "Bangladesh's Role in the Climate Change Negotiations," The Daily Star, November 9, 2016, <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/politics-climate-change/bangladeshs-role-the-climate-change-negotiations-1315795>.

¹¹ Geoff Dabelko, "Basket Case or Test Case?"

¹² Mizan R. Khan, "Bangladesh's Role in the Climate Change Negotiations."

¹³ Segufta Hossain, "Global Climate Change: Bangladesh's Leadership in the Climate Vulnerable Forum", BIISS Journal 41, no.4 (October 2020): 393-414.

climate change. Bangladesh, conversely, is a lower-middle-income country having negligible contribution to global emissions. Yet, it has become known as a “champion of adaptation” and a moral advocate for climate justice. This shows that even weak governments can lead through soft power and persuasion.¹⁴ Alice Baillat notes that Bangladesh acts as a “weak power climate leader,” using its inherent weakness as a diplomatic advantage to augment its influence in discussions.¹⁵ Bangladesh’s contribution thus illuminates the overlooked leadership potential of climate-vulnerable nations in global climate governance.

While existing literature recognises Bangladesh’s advocacy through Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), there is a lack of systematic analysis connecting different forms of leadership (ideational, structural, directional, and instrumental) to measure the legitimacy outcomes in global forums. This research is an attempt to fill in this gap by applying a multi-dimensional leadership framework to evaluate how Bangladesh’s credibility and leadership style contribute to its legitimacy within global climate negotiations.

This paper analyses Bangladesh’s leadership and credibility in global climate change debates, focusing on its twin terms as chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum - first in 2011–13 and again in 2020–22. It examines the extent to which Bangladesh utilised each of four elements of leadership – ideational, structural, directional and instrumental and how successful these were in shaping outcomes and garnering legitimacy. Key questions include: What types of leadership did Bangladesh exercise while it held the CVF presidency? Or, in what ways did Bangladesh endeavor to influence concepts, forge alliances, establish precedents, or use resources in the climate domain? Has Bangladesh been acknowledged as a genuine leader by the world community and its counterparts?

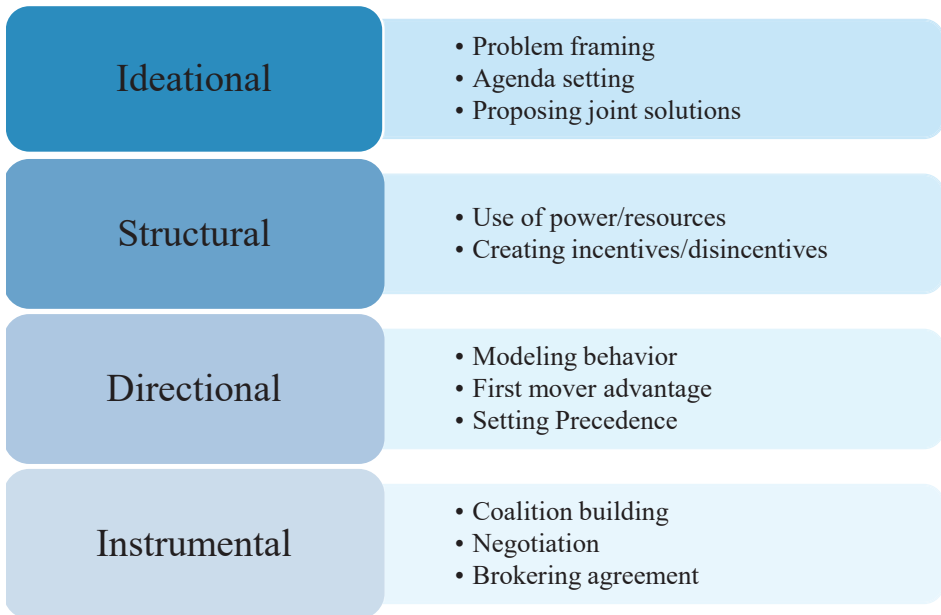
The paper follows qualitative method for data collection. It collected the secondary information from relevant journal articles, books, reports and websites. The collected information was organised thematically and analysed based on the conceptual framework. The paper is structured into six parts. Following introduction, section two presents a conceptual framework which delineates the theoretical comprehension of leadership in international climate negotiations, specifying several leadership modalities and the concept of leadership legitimacy. Section three analyses Bangladesh’s leadership within the larger framework of climate negotiations while section four examines its adherence to the requirements of legitimate leadership. Section five discusses the implications of Bangladesh’s leadership for international climate governance. Section six concludes the paper.

¹⁴ Alice Baillat “Bangladesh as a Weak-Power Climate Leader.”

¹⁵ Alice Baillat “Bangladesh as a Weak-Power Climate Leader.”

2. Leadership in Climate Negotiations: A Fourfold Typology

Leadership is seen as a crucial component for successful collaborative efforts in international climate politics.¹⁶ In the context of multinational negotiations, Arild Underdal defines leadership as “an asymmetrical relationship of influence in which one actor directs the behavior of others toward a specific goal over a defined period.”¹⁷ In other words, a leader is a person who can motivate or convince others to follow his direction towards the common goal. This influence must be oriented towards the common good; just exercising power or advancing narrow self-interest does not constitute genuine leadership in the context of regime-building.¹⁸ Leadership in the governance of global climate politics has historically been the resolution of collective-action problems through vision, initiative, or incentive that engenders cooperation to address climate change.¹⁹



¹⁶ Christer Karlsson, Mattias Hjerpe, Charles Parker, and Björn-Ola Linnér, *The Legitimacy of Leadership in International Climate Change Negotiations* (Stockholm: Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, 2012), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-011-0240-7>.

¹⁷ Norichika Kanie, *Assessing Leadership Potential for Beyond 2012 Climate Change Negotiation: Elaborating a Framework of Analysis* (Tokyo: Tokyo Institute of Technology, 2003), <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/228881559>.

¹⁸ Norichika Kanie, *Assessing Leadership Potential for Beyond 2012 Climate Change Negotiation*.

¹⁹ Christer Karlsson et al., *The Legitimacy of Leadership in International Climate Change Negotiations*.

One of the most frequently cited frameworks is the fourfold typology by Oran R. Young, which identifies four types of leadership: directional, ideational, instrumental and structural. These are the ideal types, although in reality some back and forth between such strategies is often what constitutes competent leadership.²⁰

Directional Leadership

This form of leadership, known as “leading by example”, involves demonstrating workable solutions through domestic or unilateral action. It means carrying out substantial domestic environmental actions, for example, targets of carbon neutrality and goal for the use of renewable energy, that can serve as a moral yardstick for others to follow.²¹ The mechanism is based, however, not on the negotiating modalities but on trust and normative socialisation.²²

Ideational Leadership

Ideational leadership focuses on shaping discussions, introducing innovative paradigms or normative narratives, and transforming the conceptualisation of issues and solutions. This includes contributions such as the 1.5°C objective, “climate justice,” and “loss and damage” initiatives.²³ Actors that succeed in this domain exert influence via agenda-setting, scientific authority, and conceptual creativity.²⁴

Structural Leadership

Structural leadership depends on tangible resources—financial, technical, or geopolitical advantages. Through incentives (e.g., climate financing) or penalties (e.g., trade sanctions), they modify the incentive frameworks for collaboration.²⁵ This method often aligns with significant economies that might affect the cost-benefit evaluations of others.²⁶

²⁰ Charles F Parker and Christer Karlsson, “Climate Leadership,” in *Research Handbook on Climate Governance*, ed, Karin Bäckstrand and Eva Lövbrand (Edward Elgar, 2015).

²¹ Karoliina Hurri and Sanna Kopra, “Applicability of Leadership Modes Outside the Negotiation Framework: Insights from China,” *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change* 28 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11027-023-10071-8>

²² Miranda A. Schreurs and Yves Tiberghien, “European union leadership in climate change: Mitigation through multilevel reinforcement,” in *Global Commons Domestic Decisions: The Comparative Politics of Climate Change* (The MIT Press, 2010).

²³ Alastair Chapman, “Walking the Talk? The EU and China’s Climate Leadership” (UBC Theses, 2020), <https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/ubctheses/24/items/1.0392041>; Hayley Stevenson, *Institutionalizing Unsustainability: The Paradox of Global Climate Governance* (University of California eScholarship), <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/5k72q7rr>

²⁴ Rüdiger K W Wurzel, Anthony R Zito, and Andrew J Jordan, *Environmental Governance in Europe: Comparative Analysis* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

²⁵ Rüdiger et al. *Environmental Governance in Europe: Comparative Analysis*.

²⁶ Klaus Tews, Per-Olof Busch, and Helge Jörgens, “The Diffusion of New Environmental Policy Instruments,”

Instrumental Leadership

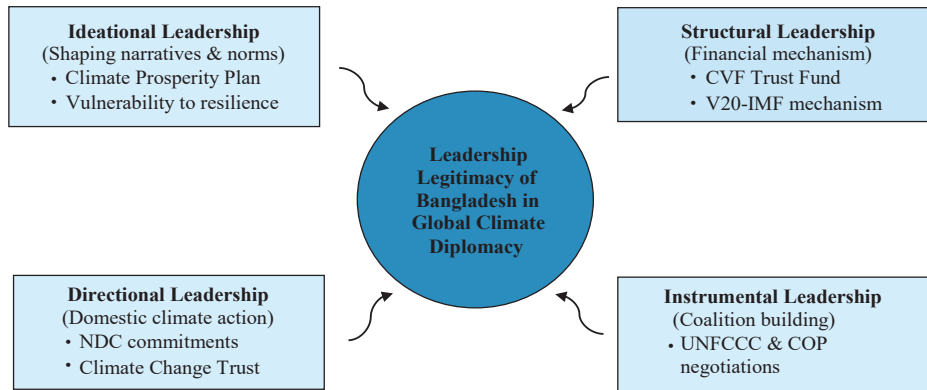
Instrumental leadership is the exercise of diplomatic skill and coalition-building to broker agreements acceptable to all. Sometimes termed entrepreneurial or negotiation leadership, it entails the capacity to forge alliances, mediate between different factions, and craft “mutually acceptable deals and solutions” in complex negotiations.²⁷ This mode is typically displayed within the negotiation context – for example, by chairing drafting groups, building consensus proposals, or orchestrating joint statements.

To evaluate Bangladesh’s leadership legitimacy in global climate governance, this study systematically examines Bangladesh’s diplomatic efforts, policy pledges and institutional measures within global climate negotiations. By looking at Bangladesh’s participation in the platforms such as the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), its pursuit of climate justice, and its push for issues including loss and damage and the 1.5°C target, the study examines how these efforts match the various leadership typologies outlined above. Through this comparative assessment, the paper identifies which actions reflect directional, ideational, instrumental or structural leadership. This approach lays out how these diplomatic efforts of Bangladesh shape global climate governance, and how its leadership legitimacy is constructed within the global climate regime. Based on the above discussion, a conceptual framework has been developed where Bangladesh’s leadership legitimacy in climate diplomacy position as the dependent variable which is influenced by four interrelated independent variables derived from the four typologies of leadership (ideational, structural, directional, and instrumental). Bangladesh’s leadership is measured by its policy influence through CVF/V20, UNFCCC outcomes and endorsement by its peer.

European Journal of Political Research 42, no. 4 (2003): 569–600.

²⁷ Karlsson C, Parker C, Structural leadership is based on material capabilities and the ability to offer incentives or threats to shape outcomes (Dordrecht: Springer Nature, 2023), <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s11027-023-10071-8>.

Figure 2: Leadership Legitimacy of Bangladesh in Global Climate Diplomacy



3. Bangladesh’s Presidency of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF): An Assessment

Bangladesh’s climate leadership is prominently showcased through its position as the Chair of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF). The CVF comprises a group of nations facing climate threats in Africa, Asia, the Pacific, the Caribbean, and Latin America, collectively accounting for a population of 1.4 billion. The Forum aims to unify the efforts of at-risk nations to address climate change, foster solidarity, and promote a stronger global commitment to and assistance for climate initiatives.²⁸ Bangladesh served as the rotating president of the CVF on two occasions, initially from 2011 to 2013 and subsequently from 2020 to 2022, when it also chaired the related Vulnerable Twenty (V20) group of finance ministers.²⁹ The two terms frame a decade of climate diplomacy and lay the foundation for assessing Bangladesh’s performance across the leadership spectrum.

During its first CVF tenure from 2011 to 2013, Bangladesh played a crucial role in establishing the foundational elements necessary for the Forum’s institutional development.³⁰ In November 2011, Bangladesh hosted a significant CVF ministerial meeting in Dhaka, where members took a decisive step by adopting the 14-point Dhaka Declaration that clearly outlined their collective demands and commitments.³¹ Bangladesh presented this declaration to the UNFCCC COP17 in Durban, asserting its significance as a critical contribution from vulnerable nations. The 2011 Dhaka

²⁸ Syed Ashikur Rahman “Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader,” *The Journal of Bangladesh and Global Affairs* (May 2022), <https://doi.org/10.55875/jbga.bd.may22.005>.

²⁹ Climate Vulnerable Forum, *Bangladesh as Chair of Climate Vulnerable Nations’ Forum Calls for Resilient Recovery* (Dhaka: Climate Vulnerable Forum, 2020), <https://thecvf.org>.

³⁰ Segufta Hossain, “Global Climate Change: Bangladesh’s Leadership.”

³¹ Rahman, “Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader.”

Declaration, a foundational document of the CVF from that period, clearly outlined critical targets, including maintaining global warming below 1.5°C and reaching 100 per cent renewable energy in member countries by 2050. This declaration signifies a bold agenda-setting ambition that warrants further discussion.³²

Bangladesh's second CVF presidency was for the period 2020 to 2022. It was a pivotal time for global climate action, as nations were revising their Paris Agreement commitments while also dealing with the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. In spite of the pandemic's constraints, Bangladesh's chairmanship was characterised by a series of initiatives designed to enhance the voice and capacity of vulnerable nations. In April 2020, the government of Bangladesh assumed the CVF chair and adopted a proactive agenda to drive "survival-oriented" climate action.³³ As the president of the CVF, Bangladesh outlined its priorities, which included rallying international solidarity for a successful COP26 in 2021, accelerating adaptation efforts, and enhancing the protection of human rights under threat from climate impacts. The country also advocated for the CVF vision of achieving 100 per cent renewable energy and aimed to expand the Forum's partnerships and institutional capacity.³⁴ Bangladesh put forward several specific innovations that deserve serious consideration. These include the appointment of CVF thematic ambassadors, the establishment of a new CVF and V20 Joint Multi-Donor Fund, the advocacy for a UN Special Rapporteur on Climate Change, and the publication of a new edition of the Climate Vulnerability Monitor report. Each of these proposals presents a compelling case for addressing climate issues more effectively.³⁵

For assessing Bangladesh's Leadership in CVF, it is imperative to examine cases by taking into account the four different forms of leadership: ideational, structural, directional and instrumental. This analysis will include specific examples from both terms of the CVF. This provides a clear framework for assessing Bangladesh's attempts to take the lead—whether through ideas, actions, diplomacy, or institutional power—and the consequences of those efforts.

3.1 *Ideational Leadership*

Ideational leaders foster climate rhetoric, norms and shared understandings, where Bangladesh is a force to reckon with. Bangladesh, as chair of the CVF, worked tirelessly to change the stereotypical image of vulnerable countries from

³² Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics."

³³ Climate Vulnerable Forum, *Bangladesh as Chair of Climate Vulnerable Nations' Forum*

³⁴ Climate Vulnerable Forum, *Bangladesh as Chair of Climate Vulnerable Nations' Forum*

³⁵ Climate Vulnerable Forum, *Bangladesh as Chair of Climate Vulnerable Nations' Forum*

hapless victims to active changemakers. During the first CVF term, the country made a compelling case for members to shift their focus from vulnerability to resilience, emphasising the necessity of this change.³⁶ Under Bangladesh's leadership, the CVF made it clear that vulnerable nations must prioritise "building climate resilience" at home while simultaneously insisting on increased global action. Bangladesh took a significant leap forward – advocating for a model of "climate prosperity" instead of merely focusing on survival. The country herself came forward to make the case of shift from survival to "climate prosperity," as demonstrated, for instance, through the launching of the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCP) in 2021.³⁷ This ambitious blueprint targets 30 per cent renewable energy by 2030 and prioritises sustainable industry and climate-proof infrastructure. The MCP is also a model for other developing countries, such as Ghana and Sri Lanka, that are designing their own plans. By projecting this image of growth, Bangladesh transformed the role of vulnerable countries from aid recipients to positive contributors in a development project, displaying ideational leadership for collective action on climate challenges.³⁸

Bangladesh also made a significant ideational contribution by strongly advocating for the 1.5°C temperature goal. Long before it gained mainstream attention, Bangladesh and the CVF made a compelling case that the current 2°C target fails to adequately protect vulnerable nations.³⁹ In 2015, the CVF, led by the Philippines and supported by Bangladesh, made a definitive statement with the Manila-Paris Declaration, demanding a long-term limit of 1.5°C. Bangladesh's diplomats and experts have effectively presented both scientific and moral reasoning for the necessity of limiting global warming to 1.5°C. They emphasise that allowing a rise to 2°C would lead to catastrophic consequences for low-lying deltaic nations and small island states.⁴⁰ The relentless push for change has yielded significant results: the Paris Agreement incorporates the ambitious 1.5°C target, which is broadly regarded as a triumph for the ideational leadership of vulnerable nations. A Bangladeshi climate negotiator emphasised that this represents a significant achievement for vulnerable states, including Bangladesh, which had been advocating for this outcome from the outset. The CVF's second Dhaka Declaration (2011) clearly articulated a

³⁶ "All You Need to Know About Bangladesh's Climate Prosperity Plan," Our Voice – V20, Vulnerable Twenty Group (V20), accessed June 22, 2025, <https://www.v-20.org/our-voice/news/all-you-need-to-know-about-bangladeshs-climate-prosperity-plan>

³⁷ "All You Need to Know About Bangladesh's Climate Prosperity Plan".

³⁸ Linnér BO, Hjerpe M, Buhr K, Hallstedt L, Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen S, Parker C, Vulturius G. "Exploring leadership roles in climate change policy negotiations," *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change* 29, no. 1 (2024): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11027-023-10071-8>

³⁹ Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics."

⁴⁰ Alice Baillat, "From vulnerability to weak power: Bangladesh in the fight against climate change," *Revue Internationale et Stratégique*, no. 109 (2018), 171–181. https://shs.cairn.info/article/E_RIS_109_0171

commitment to achieving 100 per cent renewable energy by 2050, a goal that was not only ambitious but also indicative of a strategic move to influence the global energy transition agenda. These examples clearly demonstrate how Bangladesh engaged in norm entrepreneurship by introducing ambitious concepts such as 1.5°C, 100 per cent renewables, and climate prosperity into global discussions. This strategic approach progressively shaped broader international norms and objectives.

Bangladesh, which is leading the charge on equity and climate justice, stated that it is finally time for historical polluters to be held accountable for the damage they have caused to those who can least afford it. It promoted ways to finance to cover losses from climate change and was a key actor in incorporating loss and damage as a central issue of the climate regime.⁴¹ Its pressure played a role in achieving the Warsaw Mechanism in 2013 and the Loss and Damage Fund at COP27. Bangladesh had also been a leading advocate for the human rights of climate victims, putting forward calls for recognising climate-induced displacement and appointment of UN Special Rapporteur on Climate and Human Rights, materialised in October 2021.⁴² This initiative responds to the need for addressing together climate change and human rights as interconnected issues, making an important contribution to the debate on climate security through putting behind it a human-based approach to negotiations.⁴³

The education and knowledge transfer aspects are crucial for the impact Bangladesh can build in climate adaptation, which has helped establish it as a leader from the global South: a “Southern expertise hub”.⁴⁴ The wealth of experience in community adaptation, disaster and NGO work is always paraded at international meetings, where it gets headlined as useful input to global debate. Some Bangladeshi professionals, such as Saleemul Huq, obviously led the world in terms of what could be learnt about the importance of climate policy and good adaptation practice. Bangladesh’s CVF presidency has launched initiatives such as the CVF Virtual Climate University webinars and planted a regional office of the Global Center on Adaptations in Dhaka, with the hope to make best practices easily available. Bangladesh’s innovations, such as floating agriculture and cyclone preparedness, were showcased as exemplary models for others to follow. This clearly demonstrates government’s commitment to positioning Bangladesh as a leader in innovative

⁴¹ Kiri Hanks, Mehbuba Yasmin, Monisha Biswas and Zakia Haque, *IFI Energy Investments in Bangladesh: A way forward to SDG 7*. Oxfam International, 2018, <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/handle/10546/620433>

⁴² Bernardo Monzani, IIED Support to the Least Developed Countries Group. Evaluation Case Study, IIED. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep16719>

⁴³ “About the Climate Vulnerable Forum and V20”, Climate Vulnerable Forum and Vulnerable Twenty Group, accessed June 22, 2025, <https://cvfv20.org/about/>

⁴⁴ Rahman, “Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader”

solutions. This change in narrative helped vulnerable countries like Bangladesh to be seen as a source of knowledge and solution rather than just an aid recipient, with words from personalities like Ban Ki-moon (the former UN Secretary-General) drawing attention to its place at the heart of the global climate story that is built around resilience and responsibility.⁴⁵

3.2 *Structural Leadership*

A structural leadership based on material power and institutional pull is not easy for a country like Bangladesh which lacks in economic strength. Yet, the country harnessed the collective strength of vulnerable countries, establishing institutional structures that significantly enhance their influence. Bangladesh, in its role as CVF Chair, took the lead on numerous structural initiatives aimed at empowering the Forum and its members. A good example of Bangladesh's structural leadership is the establishment of specialised climate financing tools inside the CVF/V20 framework. During its first time as chair of the CVF, Bangladesh initiated the creation of the CVF Trust Fund in partnership with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) — the first pooled financial mechanism dedicated to facilitating climate action in vulnerable nations.⁴⁶ The funding was intended to grant the CVF institutional independence and enhance its operational capabilities. During Bangladesh's second term in the CVF, the CVF & V20 Joint Multi-Donor Fund was launched allowing donor governments and private philanthropic foundations to invest in much-needed initiatives on the ground, for example, research and climate diplomacy for hardest-hit countries.⁴⁷ Towards the end of its tenure, Bangladesh ensured to establish this fund as an ongoing institution which have a long-term institutional survival plan.⁴⁸ Another structural contribution of Bangladesh is to add the objectives of the vulnerable countries in the international monetary system. It also used the V20 forum to start a conversation with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other Multinational Development Banks (MDBs) pushing for systemic transformation in the global financial system. One notable result was the IMF's Resilience and Sustainability Trust (RST), formally endorsed in April 2022, which incorporated proposals from V20 members such as Bangladesh on debt sustainability and investment in resilience.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Rahman, "Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader"

⁴⁶ Alice Baillat, "*From vulnerability to weak power.*"

⁴⁷ V20 Secretariat, *V20 Joint Multi-Donor Fund Overview*, 2021.

⁴⁸ Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), "Joint Multi-Donor Fund Launched," Climate Vulnerable Forum, accessed 2021, <https://thecvf.org>

⁴⁹ International Monetary Fund, *Resilience and Sustainability Trust Factsheet*, 2022, <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/Resilience-and-Sustainability-Trust>; V20, *V20-IMF Dialogue Summary Report: Debt Relief, Fiscal Space, and Resilience Recommendations from the V20*, 2021.

In July 2021, Bangladesh co-hosted the first V20 Climate Vulnerable Finance Summit, bringing together ministers from the IMF, Group of 7 (G7), and vulnerable nations to promote climate-linked financial instruments, increase liquidity, and support adaptation funding.⁵⁰ These discussions laid the foundation for the launch of the V20–G7 Global Shield against Climate Risks at COP27 — a prearranged financial program aimed at mitigating catastrophic losses in vulnerable countries.⁵¹ Bangladesh’s institutional diplomacy during its CVF chairmanship achieved other notable advancements. For example, in 2021, it launched the CVF Global Parliamentary Group (GPG), a forum of lawmakers from vulnerable nations and international partners, designed to ensure governmental accountability over climate commitments.⁵² At the same time, Bangladesh appointed them as theme ambassadors in some critical areas of adaptation, renewable energy and climate financing that would help to keep CVF at a prominent role during high level dialogues.⁵³ Furthermore, the CVF Secretariat was created under Bangladesh’s leadership in cooperation with the Global Centre for Adaptation, offering an administrative and strategic base to support future work of the Forum.⁵⁴ These initiatives together illustrate how Bangladesh exhibited structural leadership not by force or economic dominance, but by enhancing institutions, cultivating alliances, and integrating the voices of vulnerable nations into global governance frameworks.

Although Bangladesh was not in a position to impose any economic threats or offer promises, it cleverly exercised some of its small resources in a strategic way. With 165 million population and world’s 35th largest GDP, Bangladesh inevitably has some leverage. Bangladesh, as the Chair of the CVF, also insisted on the compelling fact that its 55 member states altogether represent almost a fifth of global population and thus constitute an influential voice in the world.⁵⁵ Thus the country effectively positioned itself as the structural leader of a substantial coalition, whose moral authority cannot be easily bypassed. Bangladesh has taken a proactive stance by coordinating a joint CVF position that calls on donors not only to fulfil the annual USD 100 billion climate finance pledge but also to significantly increase adaptation funding. This is a critical issue that cannot be overlooked. At COP26 in 2021, representing the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), Bangladesh criticised developed countries over their “responsibility” and called for providing USD100 billion a year “now,” and more in the years to come. The proposal calls for the establishment of an “immediate global climate coalition” of all CVF nations

⁵⁰ V20 Secretariat, *V20 Joint Multi-Donor Fund Overview*.

⁵¹ G7 & V20, *Global Shield Against Climate Risks: Joint Statement* (COP27 Press Release, 2022).

⁵² Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF), “Global Parliamentary Group Launched to Drive Climate Action,” Climate Vulnerable Forum, accessed 2022, <https://thecvf.org/parliamentary-group>

⁵³ CVF Communications, *Appointment of Thematic Ambassadors*, 2021.

⁵⁴ Global Center on Adaptation, *CVF–GCA Institutional Partnership Announcement*, 2021.

⁵⁵ Rahman, “Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader.”

to protect future generations, and aims to grow into a wider coalition of ambition beyond just CVF.⁵⁶ The calls are weighty as they represent the moral authority of a large group. Thus, Bangladesh may not have the type of traditional coercive power, but its position as a CVF leader provides it with an alternate form of aggregate structural power.

It is a contradiction that while at the international level Bangladesh has become more influential (through the CVF), such advocacy did not translate into significant improvement in domestic climate performance. The score of Bangladesh in the 2024 Environmental Performance Index (EPI) is disquieting, a mere 27.8 out of total 100.⁵⁷ That puts the country at about 144th in the world, and the third weakest in South Asia. Such a poor placement calls into question the ability of existing environmental policies to deliver on implementing sustainable development leading to the poor 33.0/100 score regarding climate change performance, placing the country at a poor 137th place among the countries ranked.⁵⁸ The feeble position is further reflected through its adjusted CO₂ emissions growth rate which is ranked at 154th, signalling that instead of progressing in terms of mitigation, the country is witnessing more emission.⁵⁹ The evidence clearly highlights a significant disconnect between the rhetoric of global climate leadership and the actual outcomes of national climate actions. The government's announcement of strategic plans like the MCPP and declarations such as the Dhaka-Glasgow Declaration is commendable, yet the reality is that implementation at the domestic level is severely lacking. Emissions control and improvements in environmental quality are not being adequately addressed, highlighting a significant gap between policy and practice.⁶⁰ This gap between global advocacy and national performance is undermining the country's credibility.

3.3 *Directional Leadership*

Bangladesh's strength in the climate negotiations is deeply associated with its directional leadership, that focuses on leading from the front at home first. Bangladesh has consistently demonstrated that to compel others to act, it must first

⁵⁶ Rahman, "Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader."

⁵⁷ "Environmental Performance Index by Country," *World Population Review*, World Population Review, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/environmental-performance-index-by-country/>

⁵⁸ "Environmental Performance Index 2024: Bangladesh," Yale Center for Environmental Law & Policy, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://epi.yale.edu/country/2024/BGD>

⁵⁹ "Bangladesh Ranks 162nd in Environmental Performance Index," Eastern Publications Limited, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://ep-bd.com/view/details/article/NDk5Nw%3D%3D/title?>

⁶⁰ "Bangladesh Ranked 211th in the Global Sustainability Index," Earth.Org, accessed June 23, 2025, https://earth.org/global_sustain/bangladesh-ranked-211th-in-the-global-sustainability-index/.

demonstrate its own commitment to act, even as a developing nation without any obligation under the UNFCCC to reduce emissions. Bangladesh stands out among LDCs in climate adaptation and mitigation initiatives. Its proactive measures not only set benchmarks but also enhance its moral authority in the global arena.

Bangladesh should be recognised as a prime example for other vulnerable nations when it comes to adaptation and resilience.⁶¹ It is important to recognise that in 2009, it took the initiative to pioneer a National Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, while also establishing the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund (BCCTF). BCCTF is the first national climate fund established by a developing nation and was launched with an initial endowment of about USD 400 million from its own treasury.⁶² Bangladesh's decision to invest its limited resources in climate resilience measures such as coastal embankments, cyclone shelters, and community-based adaptation clearly illustrates a serious commitment to addressing these pressing challenges. This self-financing approach is not just a rare occurrence; it stands as a compelling example on the global stage. It clearly demonstrates that even nations with limited resources can effectively mobilise domestic funds for climate action, provided there is genuine political will to do so. Bangladesh has effectively positioned itself to demand that wealthier nations fulfill their obligations, asserting that it is already making significant contributions to the cause. The significant decline in disaster mortality in Bangladesh, exemplified by the decrease in cyclone-related fatalities over the years, undeniably strengthens the perception of the country as remarkably proactive and adept in its adaptation efforts.⁶³ When Cyclone Amphan struck in 2020, Bangladesh managed to evacuate millions, resulting in relatively low casualties. This achievement underscores the significant investments Bangladesh has made in building resilience over the decades. Bangladesh has effectively demonstrated its successes at international forums, compelling other vulnerable countries to enhance their disaster management and adaptation strategies, thereby exporting its model for others to follow.

Despite contributing only about 0.4 per cent to global CO₂ emissions, Bangladesh has proactively taken steps to limit emission and promote green growth, demonstrating a commitment that should not be overlooked. This country was one of the pioneers among developing nations in submitting a comprehensive National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) in 2005, followed by an improved Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) under the Paris Agreement. Under

⁶¹ Nazmul Ahasan, "Climate Change Through the Lens of Bangladesh," *The Diplomat*, November 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/11/climate-change-through-the-lens-of-bangladesh/>.

⁶² Alice Baillat, "Bangladesh as a Weak-Power Climate Leader," Gobeshona 4 (ICCCAD), International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), <https://icccad.net/programmes/gobeshona/gobeshona4/bangladesh-as-a-weak-power-climate-leader/>

⁶³ Baillat, "Bangladesh as a Weak-Power Climate Leader."

the MCPP, Bangladesh intends to produce 30 per cent electricity from renewable energy by 2030.⁶⁴ The government has widely promoted solar home systems and cancelled plans for new coal-fired power plants. The country's priority is to peak emissions at an early date and decarbonise as it meets its development needs. Its flagship programmes such as the NAPA, Climate Change Trust Fund and MCPP demonstrate that climate action can be consistent with development goals – a key message to the Global South.⁶⁵

Bangladesh's climate initiatives highlight a strong example of addressing the challenge of global warming through cooperation between government, NGOs, research institutions and communities. Involvement of these stakeholders has led to innovative methods such as floating farming and rainwater harvesting.⁶⁶ Moreover, the fact that Bangladeshis have demonstrated resilience to climate stress is not only boosting its own moral levers but also placing other vulnerable nations on a pathway of learning-through-doing.⁶⁷

A pilot for new climate finance mechanisms, Bangladesh is now a major recipient of Green Climate Fund grants for local projects. Its plans to become a middle-income country by 2030 and a developed one by 2041 are indisputably climate conscious, as reflected in the incorporation of climate considerations into national development plans such as Delta Plan 2100 and its updated building codes for resilience.⁶⁸ Bangladesh routinely shares these initiatives in CVF meeting at home and abroad for peer learning. At COP27 in 2022, Bangladesh presented its MCPP, positioning it not merely as a national strategy but as a model that other CVF members can follow. For example, Ghana and Barbados have already expressed their intent to replicate by developing their own prosperity plans.⁶⁹ The diffusion of policy innovation from Bangladesh outward clearly exemplifies a significant form of directional and ideational leadership.

In conclusion, Bangladesh has established the credibility of its leadership through actions consistent with what it professes. A small country, however defenceless it is on its own against the impacts of climate change, can certainly

⁶⁴ “All You Need to Know About Bangladesh's Climate Prosperity Plan”

⁶⁵ Rahman, “Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader”

⁶⁶ Md. Mahbub Hossain and Md. Shafiqul Ali, “Climate Change Adaptation Initiatives in Bangladesh: Navigating Towards Resilience and Sustainability,” in *International Law, Climate Change and Bangladesh*, ed. Mahatab Uddin (Springer, 2024): 29–47, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-71297-5_3

⁶⁷ Baillat, “Bangladesh as a Weak-Power Climate Leader.”

⁶⁸ Lipon Chandra Das, A. S. M. Mohiul Islam, Shomi Aktar, and Farzana Sultana, “Climate Change Challenges in Bangladesh,” *International Journal of Big Data Mining for Global Warming* 6, no. 1 (2024), <https://doi.org/10.1142/S263053482430001X>

⁶⁹ Mohammad Ashrafuzzaman, Carlos Gomes, and Javier Guerra, “Climate Justice for the Southwestern Coastal Region of Bangladesh,” *Frontiers in Climate* 4 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fclim.2022.881709>

act forcefully at home to address the problem: spending its resources, including by setting ambitious targets for renewable energy and adaptation. This not only demonstrates their dedication, but also sets a moral example that others should emulate. Each time Bangladesh raises these issues in negotiations, it strengthens its hand in convincing others -particularly developed countries -to do more. The country's domestic example establishes the trust necessary to demonstrate its commitment to the cause, which is crucial for convincing others to take similar action. Bangladesh's directional leadership is a crucial foundation for its broader diplomatic leadership, which warrants further examination.⁷⁰

3.4 Instrumental Leadership

Within climate governance, Bangladesh has shown most effective leadership in the areas of diplomacy, negotiation and coalition construction. With long years of experience of negotiations in the UNFCCC, Bangladesh has emerged as a strong voice for the vulnerable countries. The CVF presidencies were unarguably an important platform to build this role by strategically positioning Bangladesh as a spokesperson and deal-broker for climate-vulnerable countries. This is not only a matter of perception but also to demonstrate Bangladesh's readiness and ability in speaking for the worst affected countries. Bangladesh's instrumental leadership relies on the strategic formation of alliances among developing countries, to create a cohesive, united front. It is essential to acknowledge that Bangladesh, on its own, had limited influence. Therefore, its climate diplomats took proactive measures to bolster alliances such as the LDC Group, the CVF, and the G77+China coalition. Bangladesh played a crucial role in the establishment of the CVF in 2009, which was led by the Maldives, and promptly assumed leadership responsibilities within the organisation.⁷¹ At the Paris Conference also, Bangladeshi negotiators and diplomats played an equally high profile role, coordinating with AOSIS and LDC partners, and were instrumental in the success of the Paris Agreement – securing victory on 1.5°C objective.⁷²

Throughout its CVF chairmanships, Bangladesh significantly improved coordination by implementing tangible initiatives. It can be highlighted here that a CVF Ministerial Meeting took place in Dhaka in 2011, resulting in a unified declaration that

⁷⁰ Linnér BO, Hjerpe M, Buhr K, Hallstedt L, Karlsson-Vinkhuyzen S, Parker C, Vulturius G. "Exploring leadership roles in climate change policy negotiations," *Mitigation and Adaptation Strategies for Global Change* 29, no. 1 (2024): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11027-023-10071-8>

⁷¹ Climate Vulnerable Forum, Bangladesh as Chair of Climate Vulnerable Nations' Forum Calls for Resilient Recovery (Dhaka: Climate Vulnerable Forum, 2020), <https://thecvf.org>.

⁷² Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics:

was presented at COP17.⁷³ The Durban talks were strategically designed to present a unified message from vulnerable countries, serving as a calculated effort to shape the narrative during the high-level segment. In 2020, Bangladesh assumed the presidency of the CVF during a critical period when nations were required to revise their NDCs. In October 2020, Bangladesh took decisive action by launching the Midnight Climate Survival Deadline campaign, seizing an opportunity it could not overlook.⁷⁴ This campaign is a key component of a ‘countdown’ to December 31, 2020, when the deadline for new NDCs arrives. The powers the CVF has assumed to track the NDC of every country and publicly flag their alignment with the 1.5°C aspiration aren’t routine bureaucratic flags; they are a matter of life and death for vulnerable people around the world.⁷⁵ This perspective focuses on accountability and the urgency of countries treating their obligations with seriousness. This is the diplomatic squeeze being used by Bangladesh, which is trying to shame or blackmail backward countries into improving their pledges. The campaign, which received widespread attention and placed moral pressure on major emitters as the deadline approached, became a display of Bangladesh’s ability to exercise collective power beyond formal negotiation rooms.

Bangladesh has strategically deployed skilled individuals, demonstrating its commitment to a proactive and effective approach. The appointment of a Special Envoy for the CVF presidency is a strategic move to effectively convey its message to capitals and international forums.⁷⁶ Bangladesh’s relentless climate diplomacy, whether through bilateral discussions with G20 nations, participation in forums such as the UN General Assembly, or leveraging media platforms, has undeniably kept the issues faced by vulnerable countries at the forefront of the global agenda, even beyond the confines of formal negotiations. Bangladesh organised leaders’ meetings, conducted virtually in 2021 because of COVID-19, allowing CVF heads of state to address the global audience directly. A notable event was the CVF Leaders’ Summit in July 2021, which resulted in the adoption of the Dhaka-Glasgow Declaration that called for specific actions at COP26. Bangladesh has made a compelling case for major economies to submit ambitious NDCs and provide climate finance, emphasising the necessity of urgent action and the formation of climate coalitions through her repeated appeals.⁷⁷

Leadership in Bangladesh is known for its capacity to mediate and generate consensus between diverse groups, particularly within developing countries. It

⁷³ Hossain, “Global Climate Change.”

⁷⁴ “All You Need to Know About Bangladesh’s Climate Prosperity Plan”

⁷⁵ “All You Need to Know About Bangladesh’s Climate Prosperity Plan” (

⁷⁶ “OECD COP26, Md Abul Kalam Azad – Speaker Profile,” Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, accessed June 22, 2025), <https://www.oecd-events.org/cop26/speaker/082fd55f-e93a-ec11-981f-a04a5e7cdc9e/md-abul-kalam-azad>.

⁷⁷ Rahman, “Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader.”

recognises differing interests, particularly between oil-exporting countries, emerging economies and the least developed countries (LDCs). With a reputation as a voice of the G77, Bangladesh is in an important position during COP negotiations to alleviate tensions between LDC/AOSIS and major countries like China and India. It is its diplomatic engagement, including in UN peacekeeping and South-South cooperation, that adds to its climate envoys' effectiveness. Indeed, during the Paris COP, Bangladesh mobilised the joint force of the LDC and CVF groups in support of 1.5 degree Celsius and engaged in negotiations in collaboration with French COP Presidency. This was visible in terms of instrumental leadership (saying what one intends to do) combined with principled advocacy (mobilising others) along with negotiating flexibility.⁷⁸

Bangladesh's inter-agency coordination mechanisms also go a long way in reinforcing its bargaining capacity as evidenced by the formation of the National Climate Negotiation Team of Bangladesh with representatives drawn from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Environment, and Ministry of Finance under whose auspices expert advisors are offering their services.⁷⁹ Bangladesh consistently demonstrates its negotiating capabilities, often exceeding expectations. This is evident in its submission of comprehensive technical proposals on intricate matters such as adaptation finance metrics and transparency rules. Bangladesh has emerged, beyond doubt, as a serious player in the 'negotiating businesses'. When Bangladeshi negotiators do speak up, their voices carry a lot of weight, as they represent the concerns and issues of a broader constituency and demonstrate their informed perspective on relevant matters.⁸⁰ This recognition significantly empowers Bangladesh to influence outcomes, which is a defining characteristic of effective leadership.

During its CVF presidency, Bangladesh prioritised the critical issue of finance and support for vulnerable nations, actively seeking to achieve meaningful results. At COP26 (2021), Bangladesh and the CVF made a strong case for initiating discussions on a dedicated loss and damage fund, a request that encountered significant resistance from wealthier nations. Although a final decision was postponed, it is clear that Bangladesh's ongoing efforts in coalition-building were instrumental in paving the way for the significant agreement reached at COP27 to create a loss and damage fund. In press interviews, Bangladesh's finance and environment ministers frequently positioned themselves as unofficial representatives of the vulnerable world, presenting compromise proposals—such as a mechanism for debt swaps to fund climate investments—that aimed to reconcile the differing stances of developed and developing nations.

⁷⁸ Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics."

⁷⁹ Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics."

⁸⁰ Rahman, "Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader."

Furthermore, it is essential to recognise that Bangladesh has taken on the crucial role of mentoring other climate-vulnerable delegations, thereby significantly enhancing the pool of skilled negotiators in this critical arena. Hosting regional training workshops for climate negotiators from South Asia and beyond is a crucial initiative that emphasises the importance of negotiation strategy. This type of leadership is underappreciated but as a known one that has an impact on building capacity, it must be acknowledged. By enabling others to engage effectively, Bangladesh acts as a key stabiliser of the small state bloc's unity and influence.

Comparing the climate-tech ecosystem of Bangladesh with that of the Nordics, it is clear that there are major structural and systemic constraints we cannot ignore. It is undeniable that Sweden is a significant player in the climate-tech arena, with 479 active startups⁸¹ currently making waves.⁸² Furthermore, the Nordic region as a whole contributes approximately 140 new cleantech ventures each year, showcasing a robust commitment to innovation in this critical sector.⁸³ It is evident that climate tech dominates Nordic Venture Capital (VC) funding, representing a striking 38 per cent, which significantly exceeds the global average.⁸⁴ Bangladesh's situation is undeniably concerning, with only approximately 32–60 environment-tech startups⁸⁵, which accounts for a mere 3–6 per cent of its overall startup ecosystem.⁸⁶ Furthermore, the climate-energy funding reached a paltry USD8 million in early 2024, representing just 0.9 per cent of total startup investments.⁸⁷ This stark disparity highlights a significant gap that cannot be overlooked. These disparities arise from several significant shortcomings: a lack of targeted policy support, inadequate collaboration between industry and government in research and development, a shortage in incubation infrastructure, and a hesitant investor culture.⁸⁸

⁸¹ "Swedish Climate Startup Map," Sting, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://www.sting.co/newsroom/news/swedish-climate-startup-map>

⁸² Mimi Billing., "The Nordics pick climate tech over AI as its golden ticket in 2023," Sifted, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://sifted.eu/articles/the-nordics-pick-climate-tech-over-ai-as-its-golden-ticket-in-2023>.

⁸³ Tesi and Finnish Climate Fund, Cleantech in the Nordics: Accelerating climate solutions through collaboration (Helsinki: Tesi and Finnish Climate Fund, 2024), https://tesi.fi/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Cleantech-in-the-Nordics_final.pdf

⁸⁴ "Nordic Impact Startups 2023," Dealroom.co, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://dealroom.co/reports/nordic-impact-startups-2023>

⁸⁵ "Environment Tech Startups in Bangladesh," Tracxn, accessed June 23, 2025, <https://tracxn.com/d/explore/environment-tech-startups-in-bangladesh/>

⁸⁶ LightCastle Partners, Bangladesh Startup Ecosystem Report 2020 (Dhaka: LightCastle Partners, 2020), <https://lightcastlepartners.com/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Bangladesh-Startup-Ecosystem-Report-2020-1.pdf>

⁸⁷ Startup Bangladesh Limited, Bangladesh Startup Investment Report 2023 (Dhaka: Startup Bangladesh Limited, 2023), <https://www.startupbangladesh.vc/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/Bangladesh-Startup-Investment-Report-2023-Short-Version.pdf>.

⁸⁸ Md Sajjadur Rahman, "Unilever, UK govt, EY grant BDT 20 million to Bangladeshi climate startups," The Business Standard, June 12, 2024, <https://www.tbsnews.net/economy/corporates/unilever-uk-govt-ey-grant-bdt-20-million-bangladeshi-climate-startups-1036946>.

While Bangladesh has clear direction and ideational leadership at the global level, its instrument capacity is undoubtedly weak compared with established climate-tech innovation economies. To deal with it effectively, Bangladesh can no longer afford to stay only in the symbolic world of climate diplomacy. It needs to act decisively and invest heavily in domestic climate-tech capacity. This is the kind of approach necessary to bridge the gap between international leadership and real, measurable results.

In summary, Bangladesh's leadership at global climate platforms, CVF in particular, is a powerful and important directional and ideational endeavour deserving more recognition. The country undeniably plays a crucial diplomatic role for climate-vulnerable nations, as evidenced by its initiatives like the Dhaka-Glasgow Declaration, the Midnight Survival Deadline, and its strong advocacy for the inclusion of loss and damage in the global climate agenda. The actions taken have undeniably played a crucial role in amplifying the voices of the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) while simultaneously maintaining significant pressure on high-emitting nations. Nonetheless, this diplomatic stature stands in stark contrast to Bangladesh's limited domestic structural and instrumental capacities. The cross-country analysis thus reveals a wide gulf in ecosystem support: about 38 per cent of the Nordics' VC investment is allocated to climate tech, they nurture hundreds of deep-tech start-ups every year, whereas Bangladesh massively lags behind with its sub-1 per cent allocation and severe dearth in green start-up presence. If the country fails to capitalise on investment in climate-tech infrastructure, regulatory overhauls and entrepreneurial ecosystems, then Bangladesh's claims of international leadership will prove empty. Accordingly, to sustain and establish global leadership legitimacy, Bangladesh must demonstrate the corresponding development of its domestic capabilities.

4. Leadership Legitimacy of Bangladesh: Climate Change Negotiation in Perspective

Is Bangladesh's leadership in climate diplomacy truly regarded as legitimate and effective? Overall, the evidence clearly indicates that Bangladesh has achieved significant legitimacy as both a representative and a leader among climate-vulnerable nations. There are multiple reasons that support this legitimacy: it consistently advocates for the common interests of vulnerable nations, demonstrates credible domestic actions, receives recognition from peers and international actors, and shows no signs of a self-serving agenda in its climate stance.

To begin with, it is clear that Bangladesh has taken actions that serve the common interest rather than merely its own agenda. The issues it champions

– including the 1.5°C limit, adaptation finance, and loss and damage – represent collective priorities that are undeniably shared by numerous nations facing climate threats. Bangladesh’s rhetoric consistently underscores the importance of “we” (the vulnerable countries) instead of “I”, showcasing a leadership that prioritises community over individualism. This clearly demonstrates that a climate leader must be seen as committed to collective welfare.⁸⁹ The foreign minister of the Marshall Islands, while transferring the CVF chair to Bangladesh, emphasised the Forum as an essential instrument of international diplomacy for vulnerable nations and attributed it with achieving significant milestones for our survival, such as the 1.5°C goal.⁹⁰ The praise clearly demonstrates that fellow CVF members recognise Bangladesh’s leadership as advancing their collective survival agenda, thereby granting it legitimacy. When Ethiopia’s representative at the CVF troika called on all members to “be at the forefront” under Bangladesh’s presidency to deliver ambitious NDCs and support, it clearly indicated a strong confidence in Bangladesh’s ability to lead that collective effort.⁹¹

Furthermore, the integrity and consistency of Bangladesh undeniably bolster its legitimacy. It has compelled major powers to elevate their climate ambitions and financial contributions, all the while meeting its own commitments and frequently surpassing expectations for a nation at its level of development. Observers are certainly aware of this alignment between words and actions. For example, while the Global Climate Risk Index consistently places Bangladesh among the most vulnerable nations, Bangladesh has not merely leveraged this for sympathy; rather, it has demonstrated resilience and sought collaboration. Bangladesh has therefore set a new trend in the world: A country that refuses to be passive and dependent; one calling the shots, manifesting its own destiny.⁹² Written in 2022, one study concludes with authority that “when Bangladesh is said to be a climate leader, it is not rhetoric”, given its performance in multiple modes of leadership and its willingness to respond proactively. This recognition in academia is a good example showing that its leadership claim should not only be an ‘empty slogan’, but also grounded in evidence-based studies, which also boosts Bangladesh’s credibility internationally.

Moreover, recognition and endorsement from some of the heavyweights is a testimony of Bangladesh’s climate leadership. Ban Ki-moon’s recognition

⁸⁹ Christer Karlsson, Mattias Hjerpe, Charles Parker and Björn-Ola Linnér. “The Legitimacy of Leadership in International Climate Change Negotiations,” *Ambio* 41, no. 1 (2012): 46–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-011-0240-7>.

⁹⁰ Climate Vulnerable Forum Secretariat, *CVF Presidency Announcement from Bangladesh* (Dhaka: Climate Vulnerable Forum Secretariat, 2020), <https://thecvf.org>.

⁹¹ Climate Vulnerable Forum Secretariat, *CVF Presidency Announcement from Bangladesh*

⁹² Rahman, “Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader.”

of Bangladesh as a teacher, rather than just a pat on the back, shows how strong Bangladesh is in terms of climate leadership and it is further reassuring that other people and organisations are following suit. This acknowledgement ought to stimulate a closer look at Bangladesh's policies and practices that other countries with identical challenges can use as templates.⁹³ This reveals that other vulnerable countries have reposed their confidence in Bangladesh to lead in advocating for them at the forum. Bangladesh's singular distinction of being the only country to have held the CVF presidency twice is eloquent enough testimony to an overwhelming collective endorsement which cannot be ignored. Also, it is critical to note that Bangladesh has been invited on and off into these high-level climate leadership initiatives beyond the clubs the country belongs to. Bangladesh was one of the most important members of the High Ambition Coalition that emerged in the last moments at Paris COP. This alliance, including developed and developing countries, was key to standing up for a strong agreement. Bangladesh's place among countries such as the Marshall Islands and several in the EU in that coalition is a positive indication of being seen as a constructive leader that will move the bar further even when it stands alone. Bangladesh is recognised as not just an eager but also a credible gap-bridger for more ambition. It was no small thing, for instance, when the US hosted its 2021 Climate Leaders Summit and Bangladesh was in attendance representing vulnerable countries demonstrating that the big powers recognised how significant a leader Bangladesh is on this most global issue. The acknowledgement by both the "followers" (vulnerable peers) and classic hegemonic actors undoubtedly raises the legitimacy of Bangladesh's leadership profile.

The concept of "weak power climate leader" explains how Bangladesh's moral authority and diplomatic skills effectively compensate for its lack of hard power.⁹⁴ In climate talks, Bangladesh deploys such morality and the power of the narrative to turn its vulnerability into a weapon of persuasion. The credibility of its pleas is enhanced by the fact that it has a lived experience with climate impacts. As an example of leadership in climate governance that is fragmented, Bangladesh demonstrates how actors championing a global common good are able to mobilise action without relying on established power centres.⁹⁵ By focusing on its citizens' struggles, Bangladesh transforms a potential deficit into an ethical edge that creates pressure on other countries to do more and generates sympathy for the plight for vulnerable nations as well. This is the strategic equilibrium between urgency and diplomacy that has gained respect rather than resentment.

⁹³ Rahman, "Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader."

⁹⁴ Baillat, "Bangladesh as a Weak-Power Climate Leader."

⁹⁵ Rahman, "Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader."

However, it is important to recognise that legitimacy does not imply that the leadership of Bangladesh is immune to scrutiny or constraints. It can be noted here that the larger climate regime is fragmented; there's no clear-cut leader that everyone can agree on.⁹⁶ Here Bangladesh is an actor, but it has to be taken as part of a broader leadership. In many cases, Bangladesh is a niche or issue-based leader. It is particularly strong on adaptation, resilience and justice rather than a general theoretical standpoint. Further, we need to keep in mind that Bangladesh's leverage is fundamentally circumscribed by the structural condition that the power to decide on mitigation, and on substantial flows of money, lies with emitters and donor countries. Bangladesh is a smaller country and they cannot hold the balance, except in favor of stronger actors. The legitimacy and moral pressure behind the 1.5°C goal and the loss and damage fund are undeniable, yet the success of these initiatives hinges on the commitment of larger nations to take action.

In future, the legitimacy of Bangladesh's leadership may face several challenges. Bangladesh is on track to graduate from LDC status, anticipated by 2026, and become a middle-income country. The change of status could have implications for its specific negotiating advantages as well as for its position amongst LDCs, which might look elsewhere for leadership.⁹⁷ However Bangladesh wants to take on the mantle of leadership for all at-risk nations, not just LDCs. Its leadership at the CVF level reflects an attempt to remain relevant across middle-income small islands and LDCs. It is essential that it continues to demonstrate solidarity and avoid the perception of "graduating" from vulnerability concerns.

One must also take into account the importance of domestic consistency. As Bangladesh progresses towards industrialisation, it is inevitable that the nation will encounter significant pressure to elevate its emissions in the name of development. Furthermore, there is a strong likelihood that it will consider tapping into its domestic fossil fuel resources, such as coal or gas, to meet these demands. Should Bangladesh choose to significantly stray from a low-carbon trajectory or disregard environmental governance domestically, it risks undermining its credibility. The recent cancellation of planned coal plants and the shift towards renewables clearly indicates a strategic decision to steer clear of potential pitfalls, reinforcing its position on the international stage. It is essential that domestic policy remains aligned with climate advocacy to uphold legitimacy.

Ultimately, the legitimacy of leadership hinges on the consistency of achievements. Bangladesh and the CVF must demonstrate that their leadership

⁹⁶ Christer Karlsson, Mattias Hjerpe, Charles Parker and Björn-Ola Linnér. "The Legitimacy of Leadership in International Climate Change Negotiations," *Ambio* 41, no. 1 (2012): 46–55, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-011-0240-7>.

⁹⁷ Nomani, "Bangladesh in Global Environmental Politics."

deliver tangible benefits to vulnerable nations; failing to do so could result in a decline in support. The CVF under Bangladesh's leadership has produced tangible gains, including new funds, reports, and increased global attention to the critical 1.5°C target proving the effectiveness of the leadership. It is essential to meet the pledges such as the USD100 billion finance goal and ensure that the new Loss and Damage Fund is not just a concept but is effectively operationalised. The influence from Bangladesh will remain as they still lobby for those results, despite not currently being the CVF chair.⁹⁸ The CVF's troika system (the past chair, current chair, and incoming chair) unquestionably puts Bangladesh in the driver's seat, though, and hence has the opportunity to mentor successors and design a legacy of leadership.

Finally, the findings indicate that Bangladesh's success as a climate leader has garnered an impressive degree of international legitimacy well-reported by multiple foreign observers. It undeniably meets the standards of principled, follower-oriented leadership by persistently championing the vulnerable and substantiating that advocacy with tangible actions, and engaging in consensus-based diplomacy. Consequently, Bangladesh has established itself as "a legitimate voice in global climate negotiations," often being given the responsibility to express the concerns of nations most affected by climate change.⁹⁹ Bangladesh's legitimacy, rooted in moral authority and proven competence, stands out as its most significant asset in international climate change discussions. Leadership in the climate domain is clearly not the exclusive domain of the richest or the most powerful. Instead, it can be claimed by those who have the most at stake and the determination to take action.

5. Discussion: Implications for Global Climate Governance

Bangladesh's leadership through the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF) is an important recalibration of authority and influence in global climate governance. Until now, leadership in climate negotiations has been understood in terms of material power — money, technology or geopolitical influence. Bangladesh, however, defies this paradigm of nondelivery by showing how moral authority, coalition-building and narrative power can exert a meaningful impact on multilateral outcomes. Its insistence on 1.5°C as a target, enshrinement of loss and damage, and positioning of climate prosperity as a pathway to development show how vulnerable states can move the normative center in negotiations. This indicates that global climate governance is not merely hegemonic, but more pluralised and discursivised.

⁹⁸ "About the Climate Vulnerable Forum and V20," Climate Vulnerable Forum and Vulnerable Twenty Group, accessed June 22, 2025, <https://cvfv20.org/about/>

⁹⁹ Rahman, "Bangladesh: From a Climate Victim to the Climate Leader."

But Bangladesh's example also reveals structural contradictions within the regime. Although ideational and instrumental leadership may place issues on the agenda, implementation ultimately requires collusion among major emitters and donor states. This creates an asymmetry: weak states can attempt to fashion norms but they cannot unilaterally assure compliance or finance. The ongoing chasm between ambition and delivery — especially when it comes to adaptation finance and the operationalisation of the Loss and Damage Fund — shows exactly how much is possible within a system structured around moral persuasion in an imbalanced-power way.

Further, the domestic environmental record of Bangladesh underscores a governance paradox. If international advocacy for climate leadership is to retain its legitimacy, it needs to be matched by credible domestic transition pathways. Otherwise, the leadership may resume to be symbolic, not transformative. Against that backdrop, the Bangladesh case is a powerful reminder to global climate governance that enduring leadership requires a combination of normative power, institutional experimentation and visible domestic action. The fate of just climate governance will be shaped not only by scales of ambition in rhetoric, but also by how claims to justice intersect with systemic change and actual implementation.

6. Conclusion

Bangladesh's two-term leadership of the Climate Vulnerable Forum and established credentials prove that circulating back to a government in possession of limited economic resources can still exert significant influence in world environmental governance. Over the past 10 years, Bangladesh has established itself as a leader in climate action in many respects. In the ideational realm, it has shaped the global conversation by championing ambitious goals such as 1.5°C and climate prosperity. Furthermore, it has reframed vulnerable nations as proactive agents of solutions rather than mere passive victims, which is a crucial shift in perspective. Bangladesh has made significant strides in enhancing its institutions and financial mechanisms, which empower vulnerable countries. The establishment of CVF trust funds and the pursuit of international initiatives specifically designed to address their unique challenges are clear indicators of this progress. Bangladesh's approach to directional leadership showcases its commitment to adaptation and low-carbon development. This not only strengthens its already compelling message but also sets an example that other countries can follow. By its very instrumental leadership, it is indeed a keystone of climate processes and negotiations, actively building coalitions, driving compromises and keeping the moral imperative of climate justice at the top level of international debate.

This evaluation makes it clear that in Bangladesh, the leadership has been effective and legitimate. Tangible outcomes clearly demonstrate their significance: the incorporation of stringent targets and loss and damage within the Paris Agreement framework, the establishment of new funding pathways for vulnerable nations, and the ongoing prominence of climate vulnerability on the global agenda are all critical developments that cannot be overlooked. It is pertinent to remember that Bangladesh's endeavours are not only praise worthy but also endorsed with trust and acknowledgment. Bangladesh has skillfully turned its greatest liability—deep vulnerability—into a source of great diplomatic leverage, offering an example of the sort of leadership in foreign affairs that is often overlooked and downplayed: “weak power” leadership in world politics. This illustrates an important point: Climate leadership is not the exclusive domain of superpowers. Instead, it is often the builders of coalitions and shapers of norms or examples who are really making things happen in global negotiations.

Bangladesh will have to be decisive to continue and strengthen the legacy. The climate crisis is getting worse, and it is incredibly hard to coordinate a global response. Bangladesh must continue to play a leading role and prevent such pledges from becoming mere rhetoric. The country needs to push the realisation of mitigation, adaptation and loss and damage commitments by translating them into real support and action on ground. It also needs to find its way to a new status as it is graduating from LDC status to continue being the voice of the vulnerable nations, and not lose the solidarity of those whom it represents. Bangladesh has clearly demonstrated its determination to lead the way. By offering to host a CVF regional office and committing to a comprehensive “whole-of-society” climate-prosperity trajectory, it sets a standard that others should aspire to. The leadership will persist, but it will do so alongside new CVF chairs and partners, which is a crucial development that cannot be overlooked.

In sum, the Bangladesh experience is a compelling example that underscores important aspects of global climate governance. It shows that moral leadership, based on broad-based coalition-building and demonstrable action also has the capacity to drive international outcomes, whether or not the state is a great power. The Bangladesh model presents an essential fusion of visionary concepts, real-life implementation, diplomatic innovation and unbowed advocacy. It not only put the world's most climate-vulnerable people in better stead, it also brought a much-needed sense of moral responsibility into negotiations. In the continued battle to match ambition with action on climate change, it is important to note that not only is this leadership from Bangladesh useful, but it is necessary. The transformation of Bangladesh in the world stage has lifted its stature, confirming that those who end up on the front lines of climate change are not only victims but can also become leaders.