

Climate Change Conference in Bonn: What does it mean for Bangladesh?

It is now quite well known internationally as well as in Bangladesh that the global climate is slowly getting warmer due to emissions of greenhouse gases (GHGs) like carbon dioxide, methane and chlorofluorocarbons (CFCs) into the atmosphere. These gases are produced by human activities including the burning of coal, oil and gas over the last two centuries since the beginning of the industrial revolution and accumulated in the global atmosphere to produce the so called 'greenhouse effect' which makes the earth behave like a greenhouse and raises the temperature of the earth's atmosphere. The consequences of such global warming can be severe in different parts of the globe and can include enhanced incidents of droughts, flooding, snow melt and sea level rise. Bangladesh, as one of the most densely populated low lying developing countries is likely to be severely impacted by any such global warming that might occur in future.

The second half of the sixth Conference of parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework. Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), held in Bonn this year, was remarkable for a number of reasons. It was the second part of an inconclusive COP6 held in the Hague, the Netherlands in November 2000, which broke up without any decision regarding the implementation of the historic Kyoto Protocol which was agreed at COP3 in 1997 where the industrialized countries undertook binding targets to reduce their emissions of greenhouse gases. This was largely due to the inability of the United States and Europe to agree to how to implement the provisions of the Kyoto Protocol. Despite last minute attempts to patch up a compromise they failed to do so and hence agreed to postpone the meeting to Bonn in July 2001. However during the intervening period another important change occurred, namely the election of George W Bush as President of the US. Soon after he became president, he declared the intention of the US to withdraw from the Kyoto Protocol as he felt it was fatally flawed". This was due to two perceived problems namely: (i) that it did not bind the developing countries to undertake reduction targets for greenhouse gas emissions and (ii) that it would be harmful to the economy of the US.

Thus the mood going into the second half of COP6 (called COP6-bis) in Bonn in July 2001 was extremely pessimistic and wary by all the countries, not knowing what would happen with the US refusing to take part. The first week of the meeting continued in the same gloomy mood with no sign of any movement until the Ministers arrived at the end of the first week and went into intense negotiations over the weekend, culminating into an historic political agreement to ratify the Kyoto Protocol. This agreement was adopted 178 to nil (with the US abstaining and hence opting to stay out of the KP process), and is important for a number of reasons:

Firstly, It shows the will of the world to carry out the ratification of the Kyoto Protocol even without the US (which is the world's greatest emitter to greenhouse gases). Thus despite their best efforts the US was not able to kill the Kyoto Protocol completely. It is likely to come into force by the end of 2002 as more and more countries ratify it. It requires 55 countries representing 55 per cent of the total greenhouse gas emissions of the world to ratify the Protocol.

Secondly, it opens up a sizable new market for carbon trading across the world. Most important, it opens the possibility for trading Carbon Emission Reductions (CERs) from developing countries through the so called Clean Development Mechanism (CDM) which is designed to enable developing countries to trade carbon emission reductions to developed countries.

Thirdly, it puts in place several new special funds including one for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) and one for Adaptation to Climate Change and for capacity building.

Finally, from Bangladesh's perspective it opens the door to possibly substantial levels of additional funding (e.g from CDM, adaptation capacity building, etc). However if Bangladesh is to take advantage of these new opportunities it will have to move quickly and with purpose as there is no quota for Bangladesh in any of these funds and they will be disbursed on the basis of early applications in the correct format. If Bangladesh is either late in applying or cannot master the correct format then it is likely that we will not receive any of the funds at all.

Hence, in order for Bangladesh to take advantage of the new development in the climate change arena it is necessary for it to make a timely and well thought out push for additional funding in the very short term and in the longer term to develop its own capacity to both cope with climate change impacts (i.e. to build

adaptive capacity) and also engage in the ongoing negotiations on climate change to ensure that its interests are looked after adequately in future.



At Bonn in July 2001, Public expectations ran high along with government leaders toward ratifying the Kyoto

Opportunities for Bangladesh

At the most basic level Bangladesh is likely to be impacted by climate change by a number of factors including droughts, floods, cyclones and long term sea level rise. In the short term this means that we are likely to be hit by more and more natural disasters by more coming years.

In the longer term, we need to incorporate the need for accounting for climate change into our development strategies and plans and incorporate the issue of adaptation to climate change with our development goals. At the level of international negotiations the opportunity for Bangladesh to make an impact is great but will require consistent and hard work from both the government and non-government sectors. The rationale for Bangladesh to take up an independent negotiating stance in the case of the Climate Convention is that Bangladesh is going to be one of the most vulnerable countries to climate change impacts. Hence we have a moral right to have our voice heard in the international fora. In the short term Bangladesh needs to recognize the opportunities it opens up, and use its own resources to maximum benefit to take advantage of those opportunities.

The following are some specific steps that can be taken immediately:

- (i) **Adaptation measures in-country:** Bangladesh needs to follow up on the excellent work done already in-country on raising the issue of climate change and involving the whole country in the planning exercise for dealing with the impacts and consequences of climate change.
- (ii) **Negotiations:** Bangladesh needs to take a much more serious and strategic view of the global negotiations on climate change and use its known expertise and talents to maximum effect. A number of steps can be taken to make this more effective including: the appointment of a senior chief negotiator to head a team of governmental and non-governmental experts who will attend all the relevant meetings and carry out a pro-active lobbying and advocacy campaign.
- (iii) **Research:** In order to be taken seriously in any international negotiations it is absolutely essential to do one's homework before hand and be prepared with the requisite analysis and information. Without such back up we are reduced to holding our hand out to be offered whatever the others wish to give us. We have to move beyond the "begging bowl strategy" to both moral and practical grounds and which we have done the necessary analysis to prove. In order to do this it may be necessary to

commission experts both within Bangladesh and abroad to do specific work for us. This is an investment worth making.

- (iv) Financing: Of course any such actions will require financing. Ideally the government of Bangladesh should be convinced of their need and thus fund this strategy from its own resources (it will not cost more than a few core Taka over the next few years). However even if the government cannot pay from its own resources it should be possible to obtain some seed funding from selected development partners who are sympathetic to our cause on these issues (e.g. UK or USA).

Conclusion

It is also possible for Bangladesh to play a much more significant and pioneering role on this issue internationally if we are able to harness our considerable human resources on this issue and develop a viable and focused strategy for the international negotiations. Such a strategy has the potential to bring substantial funding to Bangladesh within a matter of only a few years. Thus if we can move with foresight and skill we may be able to discover the silver lining hiding in the dark clouds of climate change looming on the horizon.

Author: *S. Huq(BCAS)*

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