

Joint Civil Society Statement

On the 4th Cycle of the UPR Review on Bangladesh

Geneva, 30 August 2023

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This statement is delivered on behalf of 17 CSOs working in Bangladesh on the thematic of climate issues. Through a series of online and in-person consultations, we developed and submitted a stakeholders' report on climate change and human rights. The process and consultations were led by the Center for Participatory Research and Development (CPRD), and with the strategic support from Helvetas Swiss Intercooperation, Bangladesh.

Our stakeholder report has the primary focus on climate change and human rights. We followed the Government of Bangladesh's efforts on implementing recommendations from the previous UPR Review on climate change. Unfortunately, during the last UPR Review, there were only two recommendations – they were too general also. With the scope of the upcoming UPR Review, we hope that recommendations suggested in our stakeholder report are taken up as they come from the direct experiences of the Bangladeshi CSOs having substantial working experience on the relevant issues.

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Issue: Climate Change and Human Rights

On the theme of climate change, Viet Nam recommended Bangladesh government to continue efforts in addressing the negative impacts of climate change and Gabon recommended to develop strategies to mitigate the impact of climate change in the 3rd cycle of the UPR.

Since the 3rd cycle of the UPR, Bangladesh has shown remarkable commitment towards addressing climate change through domestic policies, plans and project interventions. It has formulated Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (MCPP) which is envisaged to support **high degrees of resilience and gender-responsive local opportunities** to enhance adaptation actions, counteract internal migration through operationalizing systematic financing to minimize and avert L&Ds associated with the impacts of climate change. The proposed Mujib Locally Led Adaptation Hubs intends to support **locally led adaptation actions for the most disadvantaged communities, increase protection and resilience of women with livelihoods diversification and resilient housing** like “Ashrayan” to rehabilitate displaced and landless people, and so forth.

Government of Bangladesh formulated National Adaptation Plan (NAP) with a focus on long-term adaptation investments **mainstreamed to national planning budgeting & financial** tracking process. On contributing to global emission reduction efforts, Bangladesh has revised its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC) in 2021 and prepared a Roadmap and Action Plan for implementing NDC up to 2041. The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP) and Bangladesh Climate Change and Gender Action Plan (CCGAP) are being updated. Moreover, the Government of Bangladesh has also decided to scrap 10 coal-based power plants in 2021 to align with mitigation targets.

Despite all these measures by the Government of Bangladesh, negative impacts of climate change have remained root causes of not complying with many human rights obligations.

On climate change and right to life, since the last UPR Review cycle, **there has been no change in terms of occurrence of loss of lives due to climate disasters**. The cyclone Sitrang (2022) caused death of 24 people¹. In the same year, 141 people died during a massive flood.

In **the** climate hotspots like coastal and floodplain areas such as Khulna, Bagerhat, Satkhira, Kurigram, Gaibandha and Sirajganj, people are affected drastically by hunger, diseases, displacement and loss of income, leading to poverty in the aftermath of the extreme weather events. Rise of temperature, on the other hand, is favoring prevalence of vector-borne disease while intensifying vulnerability of climate affected people.

Right to life also includes right to live with dignity. In coastal and flood plain areas, loss and damage of **livelihood support system** predominantly by sea level rise, tidal surge, increased salinity etc. already made coastal lands unsuitable for cultivation, thereby causing crop loss, crop yield failure, unemployment etc. with an undeniable consequence of involuntary migration. There are many evidences of involuntary migration from the coastal villages wherein scopes of agriculture-based livelihoods collapsed and pushed people to extreme povertyⁱⁱ.

Riverbank erosion has been a major reason of displacement from ancestral home in Shariatpur district. Adolescent girls of climate migrant families face continuous threat and risk of sexual harassment and the families consider ‘married off’ them as a means of risk transfer. Forced displacements caused by riverbank erosion are also affecting right to culture of people in Bangladesh. A study by a consulting partner has also found loss of cultural traits including festivals and celebrations as a result of forced displacement and loss of traditional spaces of cultural festivitiesⁱⁱⁱ.

Access to and availability of **safe drinking water** already become a major concern in south-western coastal belt. A survey^{iv} conducted by a consulting partner, in the coastal villages of Paikgachha, Khulna, identified increased water security by different climatic events. Unable to live with persistent climate crisis people from the coastal areas (Khulna and Bagerhat) migrate as a recurrent coping strategy. A study on 14 unions of 3 upazilas of south-western coastal districts found that, at least one member in 70% households works outside the village.^v The flow of climate migrants that usually ends up finding a place in slum and squatters wherein they are denied of having affordable housing, safe water, health and sanitation, education, scopes of decent jobs and other basic amenities.^{vi} Female climate migrants face more economic challenges than man as they have limited scope and access to social services and dignified jobs.

A field survey conducted by a consulting partner^{vii} in Bangabandhu Colony, Barisal, identified challenges of the “migrant” having access to old age, pregnancy and disable allowance. Lack of adequate social safety net support forced the fishing community in the Bagerhat and Satkhira to take loan at the higher interest rates of 20 to 96% pushing them into the cycle of extreme poverty.

In the climate risk-exposed areas, especially Southwest Coastal Belt of Bangladesh, women and adolescent girls are becoming differently and disproportionately vulnerable than man. Women do household work with saline water, often drink saline water to save water for other family members, and suffer from skin ailments, high blood pressure, pre-eclampsia. **High exposure to salinity and consumption of saline water has a direct impact on women’s reproductive health.** In the context of economic hardship, poverty and exclusion people of the climate affected communities often cannot afford medical expenses. Even in the severe cases like pregnancy, they rely on the medicine sellers or quack doctors.^{viii} Mental health also is being compromised among people of climate victims due to the impacts caused by different hazards.^{ix} Heat stroke is another health issue that is on increase in the North-west part of the country.

Children’s right to education is another human right that requires specific mention when we talk about impacts of climate change in Bangladesh. In Shyamnagar Upazila of Satkhira district, children in half of the climate victim families have experienced dropout from school before completing secondary level of schooling due to disaster-driven poverty. Mainstream educational institutions often don’t admit the students after a certain period of a year, who suffered study gaps due to disaster, eventually leading to their permanent drop-out.^x

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Based on the scenario of human rights violation associated with climate change impacts laid out above, we urge the missions present here to take up following recommendations during the upcoming review.

- Recognize differentiated risk and vulnerabilities of women and adolescent girls and prioritize their adaptation requirements in local as well as national adaptation plan. Ensure implementation of Climate Change and Gender Action Plan (ccGAP) through its mainstreaming to other climate specific plans and strategies.
- Recognize climate-induced migration, monitor the flow of climate-induced migrants at the origin and destination, and initiate countrywide mapping of climate displacement and develop national database; ensure housing, land, and property for the victim of climate displacement; create sustainable alternative employment opportunities for the displaced people; initiate skill-development and employment generation programs in the climate-vulnerable areas;
- Build strong and sustainable protection infrastructures and shelters to protect life and properties of the vulnerable communities from the extreme weather events;
- Ensure access to employment opportunities and to health facilities for the women climate migrants
- Ensure availability of safe drinking water for the communities in coastal areas with massive desalinization plants, rainwater harvesting systems, and restoration and management of common water bodies
- Ensure child education in climate-vulnerable areas and in the displaced communities; provide special financial support for educational expenses to the children of the disaster-torn families and ensure their admission in education at any time of the year, even if there is a significant study gap
- And lastly, we also urge the Government of Bangladesh to seek stronger cooperation with international community to acquire more resources, technical expertise, knowledge sharing and push for a call on climate justice. Not acquiring sufficient cooperation from other states has translated into a continuous violation of basic human rights of people of Bangladesh especially the ones suffering from climate disasters;

We hope the Government of Bangladesh will duly consider the recommendations and take measures accordingly to uphold and safeguard the rights of the climate risk-exposed people of Bangladesh.

END NOTES

ⁱ This figure comes from the Needs Assessment Working Groups (NAWG) under the UN cluster system, and several consulting partners of this joint submission are members of the NAWG.

https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/sites/www.humanitarianresponse.info/files/documents/files/ban-bangladesh-nawg-jna-cyclone_sitrang_2022_situation_analysis-version_4-26-10-2022.pdf

ⁱⁱ Source – input provided by a consulting partner, available at <https://cprdbd.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Locally-Led-Adaptation-Planning.pdf> and <https://ypsa.org/ypsa/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Climate-Change-Induced-Disasters-and-Displacement.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ CPRD et al. (2020) Climate-Induced Migration and Displacement in Bangladesh. <https://cansouthasia.net/climate-induced-migration-and-displacement-in-bangladesh/>

^{iv} Source – Survey and study conducted by Helvetas. Available at https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1sOhObxYmrpk4p6umD8_VUyk_pZJlusid

^v Source – Insights on Migration amid Climate Change. Dhaka: HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation, Ovivashi Karmi Unnayan Program (OKUP). Retrieved from <https://www.helvetas.org/Publications-PDFs/Switzerland/International%20Newsletter%20Highlights/Insights%20on%20Migration%20amid%20Climate%20Change.pdf>

^{vi} Source - Field survey on socio-economic vulnerabilities of climate migrants living in Bangabandhu Colony, Barishal conducted by CPRD in 2022.

^{vii} Field survey on socio-economic vulnerabilities of climate migrants living in Bangabandhu Colony, Barishal conducted by CPRD in 2022

^{viii} CPRD (2022) Evolution, Pattern and Extent of Loss and Damage: An Investigation in the Climate Hotspots of Bangladesh, Center for Participatory Research and Development, Dhaka

^{ix} Reference - Raza et al. (2023) Stressed and depressed: Climate change and mental health in Bangladesh. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/endpovertyinsouthasia/stressed-and-depressed-climate-change-and-mental-health-bangladesh>

^x A study on the impacts of climate change on vulnerable communities, especially women, living in south-west coastal belt of Bangladesh conducted by CPRD in January 2023.