

Report of the International Conference on Environment--Development Relationship in Bangladesh

Saturday, April 13, 2013

Harvard University

Tsai Auditorium, 1730 Cambridge Street, Cambridge, Massachusetts 02139, USA

Co-Sponsored by:

South Asia Institute at Harvard University

Harvard University Center for the Environment

South Asian Students and Professionals at Harvard University

An International Conference on Environment - Development Relationship in Bangladesh was held at Harvard University on April 13, 2013. The conference was organized by South Asian Students and Professionals at Harvard University and co-sponsored by South Asia Institute at Harvard University and Harvard University Center for the Environment.

The speakers, paper presenters and participants comprised a cross-section of US and expatriate Bangladeshis from across the world. The conference is cross-disciplinary in scope and a meeting point for natural and social scientists, environment and sustainable development researchers and practitioners, and policy makers from the Bangladesh government and the United Nations.

The objectives of the conference were:

- To explore the linkage between environment and sustainable development in the context of Bangladesh;
- To bring together scholars, environmental scientists, development experts and practitioners, policy makers of the national (Bangladesh) and international institutions (such as UNDP and World Bank), Non Government organization, and print and electronic media;
- To discuss the present condition of environment- development in Bangladesh, assess the progress made to date and the remaining gaps in the programs and implementations;
- To address the new and emerging challenges of environment- development scenario, including urbanization and climate change; and finally,
- To secure renewed commitment from international governments and organizations for sustainable development in Bangladesh.

Participants and list of their respective presentations:

Session 1: Sustainable Development Policies

Moderator: Mr. Mohammed Iqbal Yousuf, DFCI – Harvard Medical School

Paper 1: Environment and Development in Bangladesh: An Introduction, by Dr. Syed Abu Hasnath, Boston University

Paper 2: Sustainable Development: Bangladesh Experience, by Shireen Kamal Sayeed, Ex Assistant Country Director, UNDP Dhaka, Bangladesh

Paper 3: Market Based Solution for Clean Technology and the Role of Government for Reducing its Greenhouse Gases: A Critical Analysis on the Policy Implications for the Climate Change and its Impact on Bangladesh Economic Development, by Dr. Nurul Aman, University of Massachusetts Boston

Paper 4: The Political Economy of Smallholder Agriculture and Genetically Modified Food Crops: Perspectives on Bangladesh, by Dr. Nazia Habib, University of Cambridge, UK

Paper 5: Role of the Viyellatex and RMG Manufacturing Companies in the Context of Sustainable Development in Bangladesh, by David Hasanat, Chairman Viyellatex Group, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Session 2: Climate Change, Bangladesh and Global Responsibility

Moderator: Dr. Mizan R Khan, NSU Dhaka and Brown University

Keynote Speech 1: Dr. John Byrne, Distinguished Professor of Energy & Climate Policy at the University of Delaware and Panelist of the United Nations sponsored Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) since 1992 that shares the 2007 Nobel Peace Prize

Speech of the Chief Guest Dr. Hasan Mahmud, MP, Minister of Environment & Forest (MOEF), Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh

Discussion speech by Dr. A.K. Abdul Momen, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations

Discussion speech by Dr. Timmons Roberts, Ittleson Professor of Environmental Studies and Sociology, Brown University

Session 3: Sustainable Energy and Finance

Moderator: Dr. Nurul Aman, University of Massachusetts Boston

Opening Speech by Dr. Mashiur Rahman, Economic Affairs Adviser to the Prime Minister of Bangladesh

Paper 1: Environmental Sustainability, Climate Change and Energy Security in Bangladesh, by Dr. Mizan R Khan, North South University Bangladesh and Brown University

Paper 2: The Untapped Energy Mine The Revolutionary Scope of Renewable Energy to Fight Climate Change, Revitalize the Economy and Gain Energy Independence for Bangladesh, by Dr. Sajed Kamal, Brandeis University

Paper 3: Towards a sustainable energy future for Bangladesh Power System (BPS) Grid, by Dr. Syed Ahmed, G M Fazley Elahee, Bedarul Islam and Dr. Sazzad Hossain of Bambos Greener Technology (BGT), USA

Paper 4: Turning Waste into Energy - A Sustainable Approach to Expanding Energy Access, by Firas Ahmad, Emergence BioEnergy Inc., USA

Paper 5: The Energy Storage System, by Dr. Ruhul Amin, MIT, Cambridge

Session 4: Environmental Refugee and Public Health

Moderator: Dr. Jennifer Clifford, University of Massachusetts Boston

Paper 1: Arsenic Poisoning in the Ganges Delta, by Professor Charles Harvey, MIT, Cambridge

Paper 2: Health Effects of Neurotoxin Exposition in Bangladesh by Dr. Maitreyi Mazumder, Harvard University School of Public Health

Paper 3: Changes in the Climate and the Economy: Challenges for the survival of the Munda Community in South Western Bangladesh, by Farida C. Khan, University of Wisconsin at Parkside

Paper 4: Will Mass Migration be Expected Due to Climate Change in Bangladesh, by Bimal Kanti Paul, Department of Geography, Kansas State University, Manhattan, Kansas

Paper 5: Climate Change and Internal Migration in Bangladesh, by Dr. Abdullah Shibli, Framingham State University

Paper 6: Industrial Waste and Environmental Pollution in Dhaka: A Management Approach to Sustainable Development, by BGMEA and Mohammed Iqbal Yousuf, DFCI – Harvard Medical School

Session 5: Policy and Sustainable River Management

Moderator: Dr. Casey Brown, University of Massachusetts Amherst

Keynote Speech 2: Dr. Nazrul Islam, Development Policy Analysis Division (DPAD) of the UN-DESA

Media Presentations:

1. Muqeed Majumdar Babu, Prokriti O Jibon Foundation, Bangladesh
2. Jasifa Chowdhury, Senior in Rindge Latin School, Cambridge, Massachusetts

Concluding Remarks of the Conference: Policy Pointers

The Conference draws several conclusions from papers by the academics and discussion made by the participants. Some of the selected recommendations are:

1. It is important and solemn responsibility of the world that we take care of the nature. It simply means that we vigorously pursue environmental friendly sustainable development. There is need for a comprehensive national usage planning, given the shortage of per capita land available for cultivation and fast declination of that valuable resource.
2. The environmental problems in Bangladesh are clearly linked to the unsustainable development within the country and harmful effects generated along the bordering countries in South Asia. The major environmental issues in Bangladesh, including floods, cyclones, and coastal saline intrusion that causes exodus at the cities, should be considered as a national threat and be kept above local, regional and international politics.
3. Intensified political process is also required to convince the big polluters including the industrialized western countries and newly industrialized large countries in the east, including China and India that they should become more helpful to relieve Bangladesh from the adverse effects of climate change.
4. Discussions about sharing the water of the Ganges, Teesta, Barak River and other international water took place during the second half of the conference. While the present government of Bangladesh has been successful in receiving a substantial amount of water, the problem of dam construction and its negative impact on ecology and economy of Bangladesh still remains. The policy of "Transit for Water" strategy could be considered.
5. Thousands of deaths are caused each year by arsenic poisoning and other pollutions. Some suggestions like clean water well sharing, home filters, deep wells and piped water came out as protection against arsenic poison related diseases. Collaborative efforts between private hospitals and government hospitals are suggested. Public private partnership in waste management could be considered.
6. Several speakers argued in favor of and limitations of extensive use of solar energy and suggested considering other sources of eco-friendly, renewable sources of energy.
7. In order to draw more attention from US and international policy makers, we should continue to drive awareness among the US universities and institutes about the adverse impacts of climate change on Bangladesh and South Asia. That will in turn draw the attention of the world community in favor of Bangladesh.

If you have any inquiries and suggestions for the 'International Conference 2013 on Environment - Development Relationship in Bangladesh' please contact Mohammed Iqbal Yousuf, Coordinator, Tel: 617-416-9036, E-mail: mohammed_yousuf@dfci.harvard.edu