

# Climate change challenges: lessons from Bangladesh

- Notes from afternoon seminar
- 1 July 2019

## Welcome remarks

- **Joe Smith** (Director, RGS-IBG)
  - Movement to “London Climate *Action Week*” is a step forward.
  - Aim of the session to use RGS-IBG capacity as convenor, communicator and stage to support public understanding on biggest issues of the day.
  - Raises questions about what takes public focus- What can we do whilst we have public interest? How can we keep people animated in future quieter periods?
  - Lessons “from” not “for” Bangladesh, long history of collaboration on these themes.
- **Saleemul Huq** (Director, ICCCAD)
  - Bangladesh currently moving out of Least Developed Country status- a positive, but reduces eligibility for grant-based funding, so raises questions about what is next?
  - DfID considering future strategy, SH suggested that educational collaborations are a solid future to build on, rather than being a donor.
  - Ongoing activities, like this event, act as puzzle pieces –sharing knowledge and joining intellectual forces to tackle the biggest global problem.

## Session 1:

- **Louise Bracken** (Director of the Institute of Hazard, Risk and Resilience, Durham University)
  - Outlined the work of Institute in growing capacity and sharing training and critical engagement around this topic.
  - Several ways in which this is done, including scholarships supporting PhD students from Bangladesh, grants (at a range of scales), visits, partnerships (with ICCCAD and with other universities).
- **Andrew Norton** (Director, International Institute for Environment and Development)
  - Outlined the five year strategy of the IIED which looks at five key challenges: increasing inequality, the climate crisis, the assault on the natural world, increasing urban risk, unsustainable markets.
  - Across these challenges, it aims to work at different scales and with various partners, and to build local networks and social movements
  - Bangladesh sits at the centre of these- vulnerable but very good at resilience.
  - Greater understanding needed about:
    - Scale and pace of known changes
    - Intersections between biodiversity loss, urbanisation, climate change
    - How to build networks across international grassroots social movements and highlight these voices in global discussions



- **David Lewis** (Professor of Social Policy and Development, LSE)
  - Researches power and politics in Bangladesh, looking at changes in civil society and intersections of power and economic development at a local scale.
  - Raised questions about how researchers understand and engage with policy worlds, how policymakers relate to on-the-ground realities, and how universities can facilitate this, particularly in the context of South-North learning on climate change.
  - We need a perspective that is broad and historical, not narrow and developmentalist.
- **Paul Steele** (Chief economist, *International Institute for Environment and Development*)
  - Bangladesh have seen that climate finance is not just the responsibility of the Ministry of Finance, but all government institutions and civil society.
  - Found that in 2015, spending \$1bn (equivalent) on climate change in Bangladesh, 75% of that was financed domestically, resulting in a complete reframing of government perspective which puts Ministry of Finance more centrally.
  - Need to bring discussions about climate finance to household level
  - Importance of household spending (found to be \$2bn, double government spending) and hits female headed households the hardest.
- **Discussion:**
  - More Bangladeshi students are studying in Canada, Australia etc. raising questions about why this is - likely linked to funding but also changing preferences. UK scholarships are seen to be less accessible to Bangladeshi students now than previously.
  - Shifting UK-Bangladesh relationship with Brexit: Brexit has slowed or stalled decision-making in UK international development policy, affects the financial landscape and weakens the capacity of UK institutions to work with countries like Bangladesh. Specific programmes not drastically affected but wider negative perception of UK internationally. Sense that this changes with ministerial appointments.

## Session 2

- **Neil Adger** (Professor, University of Exeter)
  - Outlined work looking at climate change as part of large, cross-disciplinary consortia,
  - Work on settlement patterns and future implications of movement to cities.
  - Important to look at demographic realities to this debate- (e.g. total fertility rate below replacement level for many districts in Bangladesh)
  - What constitutes safe and sustainable cities? Different perspectives on this from city planners and migrants, so interactions between these groups are innovative research methods. Migrants experiences need to be known to determine what is “sustainable” in practice.
- **Mike Collyer** (Professor, University of Sussex)
  - Outlined *Migrants on the Margins* project – a comparative approach, looking at implications of migration in four cities, including Dhaka.
  - Examining “trapped populations”- climate change not just as a stimulus for movement but as something with ongoing implications post-movement.
  - Raising questions about research ethics- trying to avoid a developmentalist approach, along with research fatigue for those participating in the project.
  - Limited empathy from Bangladesh elites to migrants/poor/periphery-dwellers, and a lack of accountability for coercive or hostile planning practices (including using arson to destroy slums).



- **Andrew Baldwin** (Associate Professor, Durham University)
  - A theoretical approach to the relationship between climate change and migration, raising ontological problems and links to contemporary liberal humanism
  - Common idea of a 'climate change migrant', but this is a social construct: it does important political work but need to examine how this figure is created and represented. Migrants are an "other" used to construct and define identity by majority groups.
  - Mobility justice: mobility is essential, but not all have equal access to it. This concept advocates for greater access to everyday mobilities- could unite research communities?
- **Kasia Paprocki** (Associate Professor, LSE)
  - Outlined her ethnographic work about local political ecology in Bangladesh.
  - Conflicting imaginaries of climate futures exist- difficult to reconcile the different versions of climate politics common in NGOs/academics and those held by local people.
  - Grassroots research, local vs. global, often very contested.
    - E.g. shrimp aquaculture: profiled by development agencies as a good adaptation strategy, but rural communities are struggling against this.
  - Important questions about the role of UK and RGS-IBG: If the UK is starting to think about a new relationship in a time of climate change, need to consider the legacy of colonialism, which is a huge influence on climate vulnerability
    - (E.g. landlessness directly caused by colonial agrarian policies)
- **Discussion:**
  - Paradigms:
    - Saleemul Huq commented that there is the need to move to a paradigm about jointly tackling global issues, with learning that can be offered to the rest of the world. Importance of formalised and informal knowledge sharing.
    - Movement from colonial to post-colonial/developmentalist perspective, and now to collaborative - is this possible whilst still considering colonial history?
    - KP argued that it is not yet a new paradigm, as on the ground realities are still similar. Still difficult for DfID to look at land issues because of colonial legacy.
    - However, South-South learning and global collaboration projects are novel ways in which collaborative work can be undertaken
  - Climate and environmental justice movements:
    - Often separate conceptualisations, climate movement more technical and more closely partnered with NGOs. Climate change is often construed as a technical problem despite being much wider.
    - In Bangladesh, environmentalists do not share the history and language of climate change specialists – conflict between development and environmental movements
  - Mobility:
    - Awareness that this is complicated, with a range of reasons for movement. Concept of mobility justice is useful to conceptualise this, but also raises questions about who gets to decide which areas are most urgent.
    - Planned relocation is highly problematic, and can involve unilateral coercion by governments.
  - Land area:
    - Complexity about relationship between land loss and deposition, issue more linked to storm surges in the south. Impacts on property rights and char islands will come to the fore, but these are also linked to dam construction.

### Session 3

- **AKM Saiful Islam** (Professor, Bangladesh University of Engineering and Technology)
  - Outlined research on understanding the hydrological cycle through modelling and remote sensing, including as part of a large scale collaboration with UK institutions such as the Met Office.
  - Many challenges, such as the issues with high quality observed climate data and computational facilities, but also opportunities for collaboration.
- **Claire Souch** (Program Director, OASIS LMF)
  - A not-for-profit which coordinates research and transforms (through open source software and partnerships) that for use in disaster risk financing and management.
  - Convenes partnerships between public and private bodies, allowing data to inform how post-disaster aid is deployed rapidly and effectively.
- **Manoj Roy** (Lancaster University)
  - Examined the difficulties with modelling and comparisons between cities, particularly in terms of links with architecture, planning and poverty (all interact with climate change).
  - “Climatising development” how do we do development informed by climate change?
  - Argue that findings need to be made “inescapable” for policymakers.
- **Alastair Atkinson** (Technical Director, WSP)
  - Working on interactions of risks, importance of thresholds (consequences of these, plus importance of knowing where those thresholds lie), risk management (particularly linked to investments of major companies) and interactive risks/resilience planning.
  - Noted that a key challenge to assessing risk is understanding feedback loops and thresholds in climate systems above which feedback intensifies.
- **Sir David King**
  - Discussed current state of climate awareness in UK- influenced hugely by Greta Thunberg and Extinction Rebellion, more of a priority than it has been.
  - Far more of an issue than we thought 20-30 years ago: 50% Arctic sea ice in summer is now exposed to sunlight, observational data suggesting that ice is losing coverage more rapidly than models predicted.
  - Illustrated with examples of his work as Special Representative for Climate Change, particularly in emphasising importance of commitment to limiting warming to 1.5 degrees and working with China and India on climate change risk analysis.
  - Countries are prioritising as a security problem – he personally worked with military/defence staff in governments. Example given on India was that the government was most concerned about his analysis in terms of understanding potential refugees incoming from Bangladesh (ie: border integrity).
  - Terminology- now looking at climate repair
  - “What we do over the next 10 years will affect the future of humanity over the next 10,000 years”
  - Need to increase spending on this (currently about £0.5bn in Strategy, not enough).
  - As cities like Kolkata go underwater, governments need to consider climate change as a major challenge to the future stability of south/south east Asia, and part of a wider destabilisation in global politics.
  - Need for drastic action- need not only to bring down concentrations to 350ppm or less, we also need to refreeze the poles.

• **Discussion:**

- The Himalayas
  - On the Chinese side, looking at cloud brightening techniques to limit melting. DK- should be considering these as a third pole to refreeze.
- Regional cooperation
  - In south/south east Asia- exists but this is limited by funding and data restrictions (particularly regarding data from India).
- Risk
  - Climate change gets articulated as a problem of risk, but is there a limit to constructing it in this way? Risk can be a useful tool for interdisciplinary discussion.
- Rwanda
  - David King used the example of Rwanda as a country that is leading the way in terms of climate change action.

**Closing remarks**

- **Saleemul Huq**- How can we move to a broader UK-Bangladesh collaboration?
- **Ken de Souza, DfID**- DfID are currently looking at a more cohesive climate programme and will commission some consultation on this, looking at research capacities and possibilities of collaboration. Scope for attendees to feed into that.
- **Joe Smith**- Aim for this was to swap notes and aid innovation and collaboration
- As Manoj Roy stated: “Bangladesh is a learning lab of actors not victims”- lessons for society and the Society from this.

**Attendees**

