

Gobeshona Reaction Article

The 2017 Gobeshona Conference, hosted at the International University of Bangladesh, brought together a variety of researchers and policymakers working on the urgent issue of climate change. Presenters spoke on issues ranging from urban planning to coastal vulnerability to political economy in organized sessions, plenaries, and panel discussions. While the plenaries and sessions were informative and thought-provoking, the greatest value of the Gobeshona conference lay in the time between sessions - during tea breaks, lunch, and in the hallways - where attendees from all areas exchanged ideas and contact information, building links within the network of people working on climate change in Bangladesh.

I came to Gobeshona not knowing what to expect. As an American sociology PhD student studying international climate change policymaking, and primarily familiar with Bangladesh from academic journal articles on migration and sea level rise, I was there to listen and learn. What I discovered over the course of the four days of the conference was a group of individuals committed to taking on the issue of climate change with a variety of knowledge and strategies. It was especially hopeful for me to see even government ministers present, ready to engage and learn with the other participants.

One of the biggest difficulties in confronting climate change is the range of individuals from different fields that must work together in new ways. The strength of the Gobeshona network, embodied at the conference in January, lies in its diversity of members, and its openness to work of all types to move forward toward the common goal of addressing climate change both domestically and internationally. We need more groups like Gobeshona around the world, and more scientists and policymakers in Bangladesh to get engaged in Gobeshona to participate in the translation of research into practice.

Another difficulty is that the Global North has a tendency to perceive the Global South as lacking agency. Even progressive research on the unequal impacts of climate change seems to reinforce that perspective by emphasizing only the vulnerability of nations such as Bangladesh that are at greatest risk. What often gets overlooked is the power of people and institutions in these countries to identify problems and construct solutions, in spite of relatively fewer resources. At Gobeshona it was clear that there is substantial high-quality work being done on climate change, and that there is a broad commitment to implementing policies and interventions to address it. Bangladesh is certainly not short on agency.

The work of Gobeshona, then, is to ensure that the excellent work being done on climate change in Bangladesh gets put to good use. The conference itself is significant, but only part of what Gobeshona does. For the rest of the year, it is a network of researchers, policymakers, practitioners, and funders compiling information and resources, and connecting over monthly topical [seminars] that connect those with the greatest power to

create national change. The conference helps forge those connections, allowing attendees to put faces and personalities to the names on articles and websites, to exchange business cards, and to make plans to work together on issues of mutual interest.

At the numerous tea breaks, lunches, and dinners during Gobeshona, I met people from all over the world and all specialty areas; young visiting academics like myself from the U.S. and Europe, experienced African scientists, hardworking Bangladeshi nonprofit workers, and international representatives from aid agencies to name a few. The friendly yet action-oriented atmosphere of the conference facilitated easy conversation over tea and snacks, and allowed for the exchange of ideas, strategies, and recommended readings. There was a real feeling of community generated over the course of the four days, and a sense of hope that, with the work of everyone in Gobeshona, climate change can be tackled effectively in Bangladesh.

Finally, as an American writing on climate change, I would be remiss not to mention Donald Trump and the threat he poses to international climate policy and financing. While I am worried about the effect his administration will have on the progress made thus far, it is extremely encouraging to know that those working in the Gobeshona network are determined to press on. Though many presenters at Gobeshona 3 expressed their concerns, the general attitude was that now more than ever we must use our knowledge and resources to tackle climate change. And this network of researchers and policymakers are certainly the ones who will lead the way.