

‘We need a holistic approach to combat climate change and extreme event vulnerability’

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Dr C Emdad Haque, professor of the Natural Resources Institute at the University of Manitoba, Canada, has presented his paper ‘Relationships between extreme weather events and climate change, and their policy implications’ at Gobeshona 4. Speaking to the Dhaka Tribune’s Afroze Jahan Chaity, he explains the causes for extreme weather globally and how Bangladesh can cope with the effects of climate change

Why are we experiencing climate change induced extreme weather events?

We are at the de-glaciation phase which means it is a warmer period for our planet's atmosphere. Global warming is a natural phenomenon and it happens through the natural cycle. Climate which is represented usually by a 30-year average and fluctuates naturally, and we get extreme events within certain thresholds.

For the last 150 years, the industrialized countries emitted huge amount of green house gases to the atmosphere which added to global warming in addition to natural increase which we call additive.

I explored Bangladesh's major cyclones and floods like we have had in the spring of 2017. We asked if they are related to this additional emission of greenhouse gases by humans? It is not easy to figure out. But scientists now have found a ways to measure this, which they call attribution – a mechanism by which we can isolate each component's role from each other factor.

In Bangladesh, we should build this kind of technical capacity to measure attribution of human-induced climate change, because otherwise we will not be able to negotiate with the western countries.

Unless we have strong scientific data, how we would we be able to argue the western countries' liability in the matter?

Bangladesh has set example in terms of adaptation measures but is falling behind in mitigation. What should Bangladesh do to combat climate change and extreme weather events?

Bangladesh is really very good in coping with extreme weather events in terms of cooperation with governmental and non-governmental organizations as well as with community based organizations.

However, the partnership requires more respect for each other and effective collaboration in terms of knowledge and resource sharing. I think there should be more openness and transparency.

In Bangladesh, people in positions of authority are usually afraid of sharing knowledge and information because out of fear of it being misused. That fear must go, the provider need to understand that sharing information benefits everyone.

In terms of mitigation, Bangladesh should work understanding the sensitivity of this delta and the floodplains ecosystems. By valuing ecological resources, Bangladesh can mitigate extreme weather events better. For example, if we are to build power plants then they should be run by clean energy.

We should also start adopting more renewable energy.

What can Bangladesh do to make emitters liable?

The International Court cannot do much here. From what I understand, the best way to do this is by publicizing the issue more prominently in Western media outlets to mobilize the public there.

Then they can pressure on their own government to start taking more responsibility. Another way is to bring resources through constructive negotiations.

In Bangladesh, we must also mobilize people to make them understand they can hold people accountable. Their voices make a huge difference.

What we are missing is a holistic approach to addressing the problem. We have separated everything. Look at Dhaka city for example, Wasa does not know what the road construction department is doing, or sewerage department is doing.

These create a huge havoc in making big gaps in holistic approach to planning and implementation. So, unless we take up an interdisciplinary, inter-sectoral holistic approach, we won't be able to overcome this crisis.

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