

## Transcript

### The view from Bangladesh and Uganda

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**SALEEMAL HUQ:** And so finance ministers have a key role to play in financing tackling climate change all over the world and the vulnerable countries are actually leading the way.

So, I'm Saleemul Huq. I'm the director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development at the Independent University, Bangladesh based in Dhaka Bangladesh. And I would say that my country Bangladesh has the highest level of awareness of climate change as a problem. So welcome to Bangladesh.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

The Bangladesh is the eighth biggest country in the world population wise. It's a population of well over 160 million people, but crammed into an area of less than 150,000 square kilometre. So that gives us a population density of well over 1,000 people per square kilometre, which is what you normally find in a city state like Hong Kong, or Singapore, or New York, or London, but not in the whole country. It's also located on the delta of two of the world's biggest rivers, the Ganges and the Brahmaputra, which regularly flood-- bring floods with them.

And so, it's also susceptible to cyclones coming in from the Bay of Bengal to the south of the country. So, it is a very vulnerable country to the impacts of climate change. Climate change policy globally is like all global issues comes from the rich and the powerful and the poor and the vulnerable, just have to accept what the rich and powerful tell them has to be done. Unfortunately, that's also what happens in the UN Framework Convention and the COPS.

Sometimes they listen and we can get them to modify it, but it's a very unequal playing field where the rich and powerful, particularly the Global North have a much higher ability to influence decisions than the Global South. I guess one of the best intentions of Global North of reducing emissions of greenhouse gases, which is a good thing and should be done and we support, tends to overwhelm the other aspects of climate change, which are more important for poor and vulnerable countries, which is dealing with the impacts of climate change through adaptation.

So just to give you an example, the developed countries promise to provide \$100 billion a year to tackle climate change to the poorer countries starting from 2020 onwards. They haven't actually delivered the 100 billion, but in the order of 80 billion may have been delivered in the last year. 80% of that went to poor countries to reduce their emissions, even in tiny countries who have tiny emissions. And the countries that are most vulnerable need money for adaptation.

Bangladesh has a very significant very low-lying coastal zone where tens of millions of people are living and are now suffering impacts of salinization due to sea level rise, which is one of the impacts of climate change. And the vast majority of the places where they used to grow rice and earn a living, they are no longer able to do that. There has been a shift into shrimp farming, which requires large areas to be put under saline water.

Global institutions in the Global North are very influential because they are the ones who buy our shrimp, so they are very interested in having us produce more shrimp and selling to their markets. So, on the one hand, it generates a lot of income by exporting shrimps globally for the country, for the Exchequer. For the finance minister, it's a good thing.

The shrimp farm owners are all millionaires. They all have houses in Geneva, in London, in Toronto. But on the other hand, it does a lot of disbenefit in terms of destroying the environment because everything becomes saline and salty and no vegetation or trees or other crops can grow there. Shrimp farming has a very significant impact on human health. The people living in the coastal zone in Bangladesh now are forced for part of the year during the dry season in particular to drink water that is saline. And if you and I were to visit them, it would taste saline.

Now, the human body can absorb some level of salinity in the water, but some people can't, particularly pregnant women who then have hypertension that then leads to pre-eclampsia, and that has been well-documented. And so there are significant impacts on human health in some sections of the more vulnerable communities there.

It also has a very debilitating socioeconomic impact and particularly displacing poor people who can no longer continue to live where they are and are forced to move. The farmers who used to live there no longer have employment in the shrimp farms. They don't employ local people; they employ guards who they bring from outside to guard the shrimp farms. In fact, we are already seeing quite a significant number of people being displaced who just simply cannot continue to live where they are in the low-lying coastal zone, and they end up in the slums of Dhaka city and the other big cities.

[NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

**POSHENDRA SATYAL:** My name is Poshendra Satyal. I work with the policy team at Birdlife International. I have been living, studying, and working in the UK for the last 21 years. I am the leader of the research article that focuses on the impact of climate change on Batwa Indigenous group in Uganda.

[NON-ENGLISH SINGING]

So Batwa are one of the minority Indigenous groups in Uganda. They used to live in the Equatorial Guinea forest, covering now the part of the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, and Uganda. In the Ugandan side, there are about 6,200 Batwa population according to the latest census.

So, the history of marginalised in Batwa, it starts from the 1930 onwards. During that time, they used to live deep down in the forest, living their life as a hunter gatherer. And then when the then colonial government in Uganda decided to settle some areas of forest as a hunting reserve, then they started to be pushed outside of the forest and then also the national parks were created. For example, there was a number of conservation reserves Mgahinga National Park has mountain gorilla there.

So, the creation of national parks in conservation area is a good thing for addressing the aspect of biodiversity loss and also contributing the climate change and the environmental benefits. But obviously, there are winners and losers based on the concept of wilderness conservation has to be free of the people. So gradually by 1960 onwards and particularly in 1990s, most of the Batwa communities had to leave their forests. They lost their home. Also, they face sociocultural marginalization that there is no recognition for the Indigenous people in Uganda.

So Batwa have been living in very marginal lands. They live in very hilly areas in Southwest Uganda. They don't have basic resources in terms of facing the impacts of climate change, so they are likely to be experiencing more impacts than others. They haven't been included in the decision-making processes right from the local level up to the national level. So, they don't get to participate in these local adaptation plans and also in implementation.

So, one of the focus of the different adaptation projects is supporting Batwa, especially in the time of the drought and due to climate change impacts. They have been provided with water harvesting tanks. But these kind of schemes have only benefited those Batwa who have permanent housing, which are very few because many of the Batwa population live in the temporary shelter, tents, and so on. Therefore, they wouldn't benefit from such schemes.

The other support that have been provided by some charity is distribution of seeds of Irish potato, beans, and so on. But most of the Batwa households, they have been settled in steep slopes where they are expected to participate in farming, but can't farm. So, they wouldn't benefit from those seeds as well.

So, in order to have more effective and equitable policy making, we need to have the voices heard and incorporated in the adaptation plans. And overall if you see, there is more focus on distributional aspect, like distribution of the handouts, and so on. But the more intricate issues of the exclusion of Batwas in the political decision-making, and so on. The sociocultural marginalised and they face-- those remain unaddressed.

**SALEEMAL HUQ:** One of the things that's happening in Bangladesh and also in a number of the other vulnerable developing countries as part of the climate vulnerable forum is a change in mindset from our initial thinking of ourselves as victims of climate change and focusing on our vulnerability to now becoming more resilient to the impacts of climate change. And beyond resilience to becoming prosperous despite climate change.

The climate vulnerable forum itself was set up initially for the vulnerable countries to come together at leadership level and not just do negotiations at the global negotiations, but also to take actions to deal with the impacts of climate change.

A few years later, the finance minister of the Philippines formed a group of finance ministers of these same countries. So, when they formed the finance ministers' group, there were 20 countries. So, they called themselves the B20, as opposed to the G20, the vulnerable 20. But that group has now grown to 55 countries. So, it should be the B55 in terms of numbers of countries, and they are growing every year.

The addition of the finance ministers has made it even more significant because finance ministers don't go to COPs. They don't really understand the climate change negotiations, but they do understand impacts of floods, of cyclones, of heatwaves because they have to come up with the money to deal with those problems. So, one of the things that the B20 did over the last few years is

they created their own climate trust fund with their own money and with also donations from outside a number of philanthropies.

And they have been using that to help their own countries adapt to the impacts of climate change and then more recently, they have just set up a loss and damage fund with their own money to help their own countries deal with the impacts of climate change.

Finance ministers have a key role to play in financing tackling climate change all over the world and the vulnerable countries are actually leading the way. We are small countries by ourselves and have very little power, but when we combine forces nearly a billion people, then we can get our voices heard, and we can get decisions made in our favour.