ECONOMY AND ECOLOGY 19.09.2022 | Sohanur Rahman

How to make COP27 a success

COP26 left many disappointed. Involving the youth and paying out climate reparations could make the upcoming COP27 a breakthrough in climate justice

Each year, low-emitting countries like Bangladesh are the greatest sufferers and, paradoxically, pay the biggest price in losses and damages resulting from climate change. The most vulnerable communities are the ones who are facing the reality which the COP27 climate summit in Sharm-El-Shaikh is attempting to avert. According to the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), Bangladesh is anticipated to experience an average loss worth US$2.2 bn per year, which is comparable to 1.5 per cent of its GDP, owing to floods. While the Centre for Environmental and Geographic Information Services (CEGIS) estimates that in the last 40 years alone, climate change has cost Bangladesh US$12 bn. This is triggering a 0.5 per cent to 1 per cent annual decline in GDP, which is predicted to reach 2 per cent by 2050.

From melting glaciers to a 'monster' monsoon, record-breaking floods have left a third of Pakistan currently under water and the climate catastrophe is altering the monsoon pattern in South Asia, increasing the likelihood of fatal deluges. The entire region accounts for just a minuscule quantity of carbon emissions, with Pakistan and Bangladesh generating less than 1 per cent, but it is a ‘climate crisis hotspot,’ as recently noted by UN Secretary-General António Guterres as well as in the in Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report. Therefore, it only seems fair, that the rich polluting nations should pay climate reparations to vulnerable countries for their historical injustices.

Last year, I spent two weeks in Glasgow for the COP26, hoping to bring positive news to the most affected communities. But sadly, it was a disappointment for all marginalised individuals as their voices were ignored during the summit. Although, at least, the youth were recognised for the first time at the COP. And yet, we young people were left feeling helpless and betrayed after COP26. The empty pledges, known as the Glasgow Climate Pact, will not protect our people from the global climate crisis. However, prioritising adaptation, COP26 established a comprehensive two-year Glasgow–Sharm el-Sheikh work programme on

the global goal of adaptation. It contains an unprecedented ambition for developed countries to increase adaptation support to underdeveloped countries by 2025.

Lack of accessibility and accountability

The adaptation community contributed significantly, but primarily online and outside the negotiation rooms. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbates the inaccessibility of climate discussions for individuals in the Global South along with systemic barriers. The disadvantaged and most affected must be allowed to participate in the COP process.

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Especially because solutions will not come just from the conference rooms packed with experts, large businesses, and government leaders, but they must also come from the ground. The world's poorest have the most resilience and indigenous knowledge for dealing with crises. It is a way of learning by doing. We don't know what will function, but we must try to adapt. Only those from vulnerable communities can teach the rest of the world about climate resilience.

This worldwide catastrophe is the outcome of a faulty economic paradigm fuelled by capitalism, European colonialism, and the increasing domination of powerful men. Despite recognising the harmful consequences and viable remedies, the global community is not acting quickly enough to address the climate crisis. We are experiencing the same global catastrophe, but we aren't in the same boat. It's like we're on the Titanic and the Global North is on lifeboats. Millions of people are drowning in the freezing water because the wealthy refuse to share, even though they are fully aware of the consequence. They can't keep doing business as usual while greenwashing with empty climate summits.

An untapped resource: the youth

The unprecedented mobilisation like the global climate strike of young people around the world demonstrates the massive power they have to hold the world's climate decision-makers accountable. Youth groups have previously shown that they are capable of acting and promoting climatic issues from frontlines to headlines. As youth representatives from Bangladesh, we spoke on stage during the COP26 to emphasise the need to make the COP accessible for young people and the need for transformative actions for a resilient future.

The engagement of children and youth in climate actions is quite restricted in our nation. Young people on the front lines of disaster response and adaptation provide humanitarian assistance and lead adaptation initiatives as first responders. Bangladesh just finished its second term as president of the Climate Vulnerable Forum (CVF). While Ghana designated a youth ambassador before taking over the presidency, Bangladesh missed the opportunity to involve young people in the CVF. Still, at least it has committed to guaranteeing youth participation at the COP25 by signing the Children and Youth Declaration on Climate Action.

Youth participation in climate action is an undeniable element of inclusiveness.

Bangladesh has already labelled the long-term Delta Plan (BDP 2100) - a holistic plan to integrate the activities of delta-related sectors across the country - a gift and safeguard for future generations. But regrettably, it is ignoring the youth in the implementation process. Bangladesh has emphasised young people's participation in the National Youth Policy and the National Adaptation Plan. However, successful measures to involve children and youth from the local, national, and global levels have yet to be witnessed. The government has not allowed young people to participate in the country's delegation and negotiation processes.

Youth participation in climate action is an undeniable element of inclusiveness. The young people must be included in the decision-making processes and even execution of climate policies, plans and projects partnering with young people at all levels. The youth is already doing its part, by convening frequent discussions and lobbying, closely working with key ministries and parliamentary platforms like Climate Parliament Bangladesh to engage young people in the driving seats on climate action. The government and other development partners must reciprocate.

The need for more inclusion

The upcoming COP27 must be more inclusive. A good start is the annual pre-COP which will include a Youth COP as well as an '#AccountabilityCOP'. But in the run-up to the conference, there must be more young people represented in national delegations and in meaningful engagement in sub-national, national, and regional talks. It must expand access to badges and financing for youth, particularly those from the Global South, and allow observers to actively engage in negotiating sessions.

At the moment, we are worried that COP27 will be worse than COP26. There have already been requests that the venue is moved from Egypt due to concerns about human rights violations as a consequence of the country's restriction on civic space and the lack of rights to free expression, association, and peaceful assembly, as well as the persecution of the gender diverse groups. Human Rights Watch already labelled Egypt's presidency of the COP27 a ‘glaringly poor choice.’

On the road to COP27, we young people will present our agenda and continue to advocate for effective outcomes. If global leaders play less on hypocrisy and invest more, COP27 can be a breakthrough in climate justice for vulnerable peoples. In addressing this catastrophe, we advocate for climate justice for all people everywhere which is a new frontier of human rights.



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