



► Durban Platform: Open to All But Not for Passengers with Special Needs

A reflection on the Conference of the Parties to the UNFCCC (COP 17) in Durban

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Introduction

I was one among the 14570 participants in the COP 17 (6172 were part delegates, 6975 were observers and 1423 press/media people). More specifically, I was one of the 6975 Observers in the COP 17. My Name is Jahangir Hasan Masum and I am involved with Coastal development Partnership (CDP), Bangladesh.

CDP is a not-for-profit, public interest serving progressive development & environmental activist organization, working in Bangladesh. In 1997, CDP emerged as an organization through people's movement. CDP works with socially excluded, extreme poor people, & marginalized indigenous community and grassroots NGOs/CBOs to make a positive difference to the lives of the marginalized indigenous people, rural & coastal poor. Since 2002, CDP has been working on climate Justice, Environmental Governance & Natural Resources Conservation with human rights-based & gender sensitive approach.

Bangladesh is naturally vulnerable to climate change because of physiographic characters of the country. Most of the country is low-lying land comprising mainly the delta of the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers. Floodplains occupy 80% of the country. Approximately 20 percent of the country and millions of people experiences normal annual flooding and all the previous major flooding events have inundated more than fifty percent of the country's total area. Bangladesh holds the longest natural beach of the world (the southeast coast of Bangladesh) and the Sundarbans; the largest single block mangrove ecosystem in the world (shared with India), 798th UNESCO world heritage site, Ramsar Wetlands (the southwestern coast of Bangladesh).



Bangladesh currently has extreme vulnerability to cyclones, because of its distinctive location and topography, as well as the low capacity of its society and institutions to cope with such extreme events. All IPCC impact assessments carried out so far have identified Bangladesh as one of the most susceptible cases as regards the negative impacts of climate change. The geographic location and geomorphological conditions of Bangladesh have made the country one of the most vulnerable ones to climate change, particularly to Sea Level Rise.

The coastal region of the country where mean elevations are within 1 to 3 meter are identified as the most vulnerable part due to climate change. Salt water from the Bay of Bengal has already penetrated 100 km or more towards inland. In Bangladesh, average temperature has registered an increasing trend of about 1°C in May and 0.5°C in November during the 14-year period from 1985 to 1998.

The Durban Outcome: Sound like an Empty Promise

On December 10, 2011; 5.30 am at Durban, South Africa; after 14 days of negotiations delegates from 195 countries decided:

- 1) A Second Commitment Period for the Kyoto Protocol shall begin on January 1, 2013 and end either on December 31, 2017 or 2020. Before May 1, 2012, countries, which take part to this second period, have to convert their economy-wide reduction targets into Quantified Emission Limitation or Reduction Objectives (QELROs) and submit them for consideration by the next session of the AWG KP. Nevertheless, Canada, Japan and Russia do not intend to participate in a second period.
- 2) A process will be launched for developing a common legal regime/protocol on climate change encompassing all parties under the Convention by the newly established Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (AWG DPEA) has been. The AWG DPEA group shall start its work in 2012 in order to adopt the new instrument by 2015 and to implement it from 2020. It is quite interesting that United States, China, India and Brazil supported the process for developing this common legal regime. USA, Canada, Japan and Russia are all not party to Second Commitment Period for the Kyoto Protocol.



Ministers gather in a huddle where agreement was reached to extend the Kyoto Protocol during a plenary session at the United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP17) in Durban, December 11, 2011. Photo: Reuters

- 3) The Green Climate Fund starts to operate in 2012 as an operating entity of the Financial Mechanism of the Convention. Nevertheless, there was neither a decision nor a political commitment to guarantee sustained financial contributions for the Green Climate Fund (GCF). The GCF will rely on voluntary instead of mandatory contributions and could remain as an empty shell.
- 4) The agriculture was included in an LCA outcome as a push from World Bank and agribusiness sector to promote corporate industrial agriculture or so called "climate smart agriculture".
- 5) The programme on National Adaptation Plans has been postponed until COP18. Parties also decided to begin a new Work Program on Loss and Damage and to renew the existing Nairobi Work Program on various adaptation issues.
- 6) Parties agreed on a process to enable least developed countries (LDCs) to formulate and implement national adaptation plans (NAPs). This process is voluntary, as is provision of funding to support NAPs development.

Review of the experiences at COP17

As an observer of the COP 17, my key responsibility was to deliver messages from the people of my country who are unable to attend and link their voices with the global community. Throughout the COP 17, I have advocated that any negotiation on climate change must respect people's individual and collective rights. In this COP, I tried to learn more about gender-sensitive climate change approach and participated almost all the side events linked with gender and climate change. I also have tried to highlight the success of the women in climate adaptation in many side events during the COP 17. I also tried to promote the idea that COP 17 negotiation are spending public money, whether it is from the developing south or developed north. Therefore, COP must serve the people's needs, demand, interests and hopes.



Transforming Marginalized Women into Grassroots Climate Leaders through Community-Driven Climate Change Adaptation in Bangladesh



Jahangir Hasan Masum



On 29 November 2011, I participated as a panelist in the Church Development Service (EED) and LAYA are organised side event at 16:45-18:15 o'clock on "Towards A Low Emissions Economy - Pro Poor and Gender Responsive Adaptation and Mitigation: Experiences from India and Bangladesh."

Voices of the Delegations

The South African lead negotiator sees the Durban Package as a comprehensive deal that has taken into account the necessary compromise and has produced a credible outcome. On the hand, the Venezuelan delegate said "We all know this is a very bad agreement, that it will require more work next year and it cannot be adopted." Venezuela also reported that poor nations had been threatened they will not get money for climate finance if they blocked the texts. At one stage of the final COP plenary, the Russian ambassador declared that though he did not know what was going on, or what was being passed, he would nevertheless not block progress. Observers reported that Parties accepted a less than satisfactory LCA text as the price for moving forward with a second commitment period for Kyoto and the Durban Platform. I found that due to lack of human resources, many vulnerable countries are unable to negotiate effectively. US lead negotiator Todd Stern focuses on the successes of COP17 in regards to keeping the international climate negotiation process alive. Luiz Alberto Figueiredo Machado, Brazil's lead negotiator said "I am relieved that we have what we came here to get," he said. What a great success!!

Personally, I was bit frustrated but at the end Durban calls for a climate agreement to be reached by 2015 is somehow better than the worst outcome I had anticipated.

As an observer, sometimes I was frustrated by seeing that global policy makers are making simple things complicated while the common threat from climate change is mounting higher each day we are passing. However, when at the concluding plenary a Venezuelan negotiator jumps on a table and demands the floor fighting with the chair, the frustration is not my personal feelings. It has to be noted that COP 17

concluded at 5:30am two days after the scheduled end, which was tiresome. I went to the final plenary at morning and the plenary was supposed to start at morning but it started at evening. Many observers and delegates had no way but to leave for their return flight. During the extended two days, parties were stuck with few specific words in the negotiating texts, without focusing on real action to address climate change.

Sometimes I felt that this is not really negotiation, rather a friendly consultation among vested groups. Negotiations could be successful only when it happens between two groups: polluters and victims of polluters as well as both parties face threats from common problem, either more or less and both parties want to eliminate that threat by working together, taking responsibility together according to their capability.

Critical reflections on the outcomes of the COP 17

The COP 17 delivered a jumble package blend with Quantified Emission Limitation or Reduction Objectives (QELROs) & Ad Hoc Working Group on the Durban Platform for Enhanced Action (AWG DPEA). However, the Durban Package failed to deliver much needed immediate action to save the vulnerable people. Besides, the package language is very weak and open to much debate in the upcoming years. Bangladeshi civil society networks in a press conference commented USA, India and China as climate axis of evil and urged LDC and SIDS country to break the G77 +China group and urged to emerge as separate negotiation group in UNFCCC and also in all other global negotiation process too.

The Durban Platform paves the way for initiating a new round of negotiations to be concluded by 2015 and operationalized by 2020, which ultimately delaying the future direction of the climate regime. Beside, a single global treaty by 2020 means that countries has to take on more or less the same mitigation commitments irrespective of level of development. Same commitment for Bangladesh and USA, emitter and victim emission receives same legal treatment. The Durban Platform abandoned the two-track Bali Roadmap process by removing the difference between developed and developing country mitigation actions by 2015.

Once again, COP failed to agree on the financial commitments and consequently, the urgent adaptation needs of the most vulnerable countries are remaining literally unfunded or underfunded. The new Green Climate Fund is nothing more than an empty promise with voluntary pledges in the long term. The Durban Package repeats similar financial commitments like Copenhagen and Cancun but fails to secure at least 50 percent of all new funding commitments for adaptation. The package also failed to provide direction on the long-term finance regarding the fast start finance of \$100 billion per year by 2020.

The COP 17 made no progress on urgently needed, new and additional public finance for climate action and adaptation measures to protect vulnerable communities in developing countries. Although many delegates and observers may consider Durban outcome a as positive direction towards a legally binding global agreement involving the world's major emitters, I see much more unjust burden coming to the vulnerable developing countries in the future negotiations. One of the core principles of the UN framework convention, "common but differentiated responsibilities (CBDR) and respective capabilities" is not in the Durban package.

Expectations for Future

I see a continuous and effective international advocacy intervention is much required to ensure a universal legal agreement before 2015. In addition, we should work on it from the January 2012, not just COP participation. I expect that the UN Climate Change process shall increase ambition to act and will be led by the climate science in the IPCC's Fifth Assessment Report and the global Review from 2013-2015.

Since COP 17 decided to adopt a universal legal agreement on climate change before 2015, more intense advocacy and campaign is required. In that case, my suggestion is to focus on intersession climate talks so that we can follow the issues closely and have more scope for advocacy. I have learned about most of the negotiations issues from intersession climate talks. The UN leadership has to be more effective and strong to address the global climate challenge. The emitter countries must follow the principle of historical responsibility and show their commitment for the climate victim countries, especially to support developing countries like Bangladesh with finance and technology for climate change education. Polluter pay principle should be enforced at global level and False market based solutions that violates food sovereignty has to be stopped.

Conclusion

Durban Platform shifts countries towards a legally binding agreement, which would come into force in 2020. According to the 2011 World Energy Outlook published by the International Energy Agency, delaying action until 2020 means that the costs of carbon reduction would be four times greater than they would be today and it would boost global temperatures by at least 3.5 degrees C by 2100. The 2°C is the target approved under the Copenhagen Accord, and the Cancun Agreement. The 1.5°C is a demand from the small islands states, the African Group, and the Less Developed Countries.

Although Durban platform aims to brings all COP passengers from both the developed and developing world onto one track but fails to support passengers with special needs (Small Island & most vulnerable countries). I demand to keep the chances of warming below 1.5°C to save the future of the planet and it needs only a strong political will. We should not use financial crisis as an excuse to hold a strong political will. If we do not act now there will be no future for the poor people of the world.