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No Climate Justice without Gender Justice

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*The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the United Nations.

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Context:

If climate impacts on women is investigated, that will reveal and reinforce the existing deeply rooted inequalities within societies. It has been observed that women are disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change. When climate induced disasters hit any poor communities, it is the women and young people who are mostly affected due to not having enough support and being burdened with societal pressure. Social norms demand that women, especially mothers, will act as the primary providers of food for their families, which is extremely hard for women under conditions like floods and droughts. According to numerous research, it is found that, violence against women increases after a natural disaster because of increased traumatic stress, scarcity of basic supplies, and destruction of authoritative systems.

However, significant progress has been made by women across the globe, ever since countries have recognized and came into agreement about the importance of women's participation in climate action at the 2015 United Nations Climate Change Conference. From leading the global negotiation process to acting at community level - be it scientific research or activist voice, women have demonstrated their leadership and continued to do so in the fight against climate change. Women, especially from the global south, are making remarkable differences in their community which includes participation in the decision-making process and mobilizing themselves in taking initiatives to address the ongoing climate crisis. They have set out examples to be the finest climate leaders during trying times in building resilience to protect their families and communities.

Like most other parts of the globe, women in Bangladesh face greater challenges compared to men for climate change, due to increased sexual harassment during any crisis; increased water related stresses all over Bangladesh leading to increased school dropouts of girls and child marriage; tripled burden because of displacement and migration associated with climate change impacts, and socially exclusion due to high salinity induced skin problem in southern Bangladesh. For example, in the char areas of Kurigram, in the northern part of Bangladesh, vulnerability due to natural disasters are 'gendered' and socially constructed. Despite these challenges, women in Bangladesh have demonstrated enormous capacity to respond to emergencies efficiently through increased women empowerment and decision-making ability of women. For example, in the areas of Sirajganj where river erosion displaced communities and salinity threatened food security severely in Dacope Khulna, situations were turned around by the initiatives taken by local community women.

In this context, women's voices, responsibilities and knowledge on the environment and the challenges they face will need to be a central part of the adaptive response to a rapidly changing climate. Bangladesh has been playing an active role in climate change negotiation process and taken several steps such as passage of legislation, policy, strategy and action plan, post 1994 with the ratification of United Nation Framework Convention (UNFCCC). National Sustainable Development Strategy (NSDS), Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan 2009 (BCCSAP), National Plan for Disaster Management 2010- 15, and Perspective Plan of Bangladesh 2010-21 address women's vulnerability associated with climate change.

But these existing legislations fail to address the vulnerability of women in the reality of climate change. As a result, the number of services or safety net program to address the vulnerability of women in the context of climate change remains inadequate and vulnerability is not addressed specifically enough.

These state that due to climate change women will face economic, social and health problems, but do not clarify the kinds of problems women will face to create and develop relevant response. Moreover, there is no specific mention as to how issues of the women and children from coastal areas, char areas, southern parts of the country where there is water logging, and rise in salinity, are to be addressed or such interventions to be financed.

In Bangladesh, public services do not suffice to meet realities on the ground. Water, sanitation, and health care services require to be re-designed to address the specific needs of women and girls.

Food insecurity, due to extreme weather and climate change, is causing crop failure push up and increasing vulnerabilities for women on many fronts proving that the “business as usual approach” is not working and providing the scope to rethink existing models of development, programmatic interventions.

Special and concerted efforts, policies and programs are imperative to address the matter of access to information, models, and climate change finance to address the vulnerability and move to growth.

Initiatives by Government of Bangladesh:

At global level, Bangladesh has played a significant role in the global climate community since 1998 in furthering the Climate Change agenda for the most vulnerable and least developing countries (LDC). At the Bali Conference in December 2007, Bangladesh emphasized targeting food security, water, energy, and livelihoods for LDCs. In February 2008, Bangladesh represented the LDCs at the United Nations General Assembly to focus immediate international support to meet the Climate Change impacts. Bangladesh continues to lead current round of Climate Change negotiations for a fair and equitable post-Kyoto Framework and outcome for developing countries at the Copenhagen Conference of Parties (COP 15).

At national level, Bangladesh has already adopted various policies to address climate change and invested heavily in adaptation measures. It has invested in flood management schemes, coastal embankments, cyclone, and flood shelters, as well as in raising roads and highways, and in researching and developing a climate resilient farming system. As a result, Bangladesh’s ability to manage disasters, in particular floods and cyclones, has improved dramatically since 1991.

Government of Bangladesh has approved the Delta Plan 2100 on September 4, 2018, to secure the future of water resources and mitigate the likely effects of climate change and natural disasters. The Bangladesh Delta Plan (BDP) 2100 is a broad-based long-term vision about the likely changes and necessary intervention to make the Bangladesh Delta a safe by the end of the 21st Century.

The Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan is currently underway. This plan will provide a holistic pathway to prosperity highlighting Bangladesh as a global benchmark across the world.

Bangladesh has prepared a Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan, which articulates clearly how Bangladesh intends to scale up its effort to become resilient to climate change. The Government of Bangladesh through Ministry of Environment and Forests (MOEF) has taken several policy and institutional decisions to address climate change and climate variability issues in Bangladesh. The MOEF has taken the lead on discussing, planning, and developing policy and programs on climate change issues in the government system. It is also responsible to take the climate change issue forward at the global level as operational focal point of United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

and Global Environment Facility (GEF). The major responsibilities for MoEF remains preparation of national communication, formulation of adaptation programs, providing approval of CDM projects, leading international negotiations, facilitating mainstreaming climate change at sectoral level etc. The MoEF has made substantial progress in developing some policy and institutional instruments to reduce impacts of climate change. These mainly include development of National Adaptation Programmes of Action (NAPA), Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), establishing Climate Change Unit (CCU) under the MoEF, Climate Trust Fund.

ActionAid Bangladesh Initiatives:

ActionAid Bangladesh recognized through their work that women would be able to do more to combat the effects of climate change if they were included in the decision-making process regularly. To ActionAid Bangladesh, climate justice is understanding how climate change affects different categories of people based on their sex, location in the world, nature of employment or income status, and how the same group of people mobilize themselves in building resilience to protect their lives. It is also about having women's voices in climate debates and conversations, especially in the global south where women work daily to sustain their families. As a feminist principle guided organization, and an organization that believes in climate and ecological justice, it is all about building trustworthy relations, threading common strategies, and amplifying the lived realities of people on the frontline of climate change.

ActionAid Bangladesh empowers women in Bangladesh to adapt to climate change at the community level. Groups of women lead vulnerability assessments of climate risks and then identify action plans. These actions plans are then implemented by the same groups of women brought together by ActionAid Bangladesh. This community-based approach empowers women to express their needs and increase their resilience to climate change. For example, improved cooking-stoves were installed in 110 households, 10 temporary dams were built to preserve fresh water for irrigation and reduce salinity in the land, and a raised cluster village was created for landless families in flood-prone areas. In the coastal areas and chars of Bangladesh where communities were most affected by cyclone SIDR in 2007 and Aila in 2009, information was provided to women, their capacity developed, research groups formed under the support and guidance of ActionAid Bangladesh and its partners to assess vulnerability. Women came up with local solution for community-based adaptation thereby reversing a situation which could have pushed the community further into poverty. In Lalua Char women research groups identified intrusion of salinity into cultivable land as a problem, thus organized and become vigilant against groups that would damage water bodies for shrimp cultivation and profit. The outcome was rice harvest, cultivation of multiple crops in Lalua, and rice harvest after 3 years in Dacope.

Among the work ActionAid Bangladesh does for empowering women and bringing gender equity the following are worth mentioning:

Advocating for Gender responsive climate change budgeting in Bangladesh:

The public finance system plays an integral role in addressing the intersecting issues of gender inequality and climate change. It has become increasingly critical for countries to adopt a gender-responsive climate change budgetary approach to support gender equity while mitigating the adverse effects of global warming and building the resilience of communities in protecting their environment, resources, and livelihoods. For many decades, gender-responsive budgeting has been used widely by countries for

building awareness, managing resources, and strengthening accountability processes by tracking gender-related spending, enabling impact evaluation, and informing implementation plans. ActionAid Bangladesh has been advocating with the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) to integrate gender into its climate-related investments and to undertake gender-responsive climate change budgeting (GR-CCB).

Lobbying for policy reform and implementation of the existing policies:

Based on the analysis of progress made and existing policies, ActionAid Bangladesh suggested several recommendations for Government of Bangladesh, including the following-

- Revising and implementing the CCGAP with clear parameters and indicators to measure gender responsive climate investment, improve existing budget report processes, strengthen audit processes to evaluate program effectiveness and ensure transparency and accountability.
- Establishing a joint government-civil society taskforce that will ensure the engagement of a wider range of stakeholders in planning and budgeting to strengthen gender-responsive climate budget preparation, implementation, and assessment.
- Producing and publishing more detailed disaggregated budget data to support public engagement, impact assessment and accountability, and
- Enhancing the capacity of government officials and development actors.

Besides, ActionAid Bangladesh also proposed some specific policy recommendations, including the below:

- **Recognize the value of women contribution in community-based adaptation and mitigation where relevant:** Monetize the value of women works in the home and community particularly regarding natural resource management and green practices. Institute reward systems for contributions of women to CBA. This will act as an incentive to further women's contribution and leadership. Celebrate women leaderships regarding existing solutions as well as innovation to address climate change vulnerabilities.
- **Recognize gender gaps in policy, planning and budget:** It is imperative that GoB takes into consideration the numerous policy reviews by academics and non-government organizations available to identify gender gaps regarding climate change planning, finance, and implementation. GoB needs to undertake research for policy reform to improve the system of developing climate change adaptation plans and finance linked with gender priority. Government needs to incorporate gender lenses in climate finance and in selection of projects for BCCTF and BCCRF. They need to review the present gender budgeting policy and incorporate climate change and gender diversity in the analysis and planning. Initiatives need to be taken for annual budget preparation on gender budgeting for ministries works together with Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change and Ministry of Planning to maximize the incorporation of gender lenses and dimension in addressing climate change.
- **Ensure social protection programs are established for women vulnerable to climate change:** Bangladesh needs to increase coverage of social protection program schemes for climate change vulnerable communities. At the same time, impediments regarding the access of social protection program for women and girls needs to be reduced and removed. The country needs to ensure that at the local level (Union Parishad level) women and children welfare committee

as well as Disaster Risk Reduction committee with women membership plays a decision-making role in developing social protection program.

- **Ensure greater coordination for developing and implementing gender sensitive budget and plans:** There is an existing steering committee established on CC and Gender equality that bridges MoEF and MoWCA initiatives. It is important to create stronger mechanism for inter-ministerial coordination and co-operation to further both adaptation and mitigation of climate change.
- **Establish effective implementation and monitoring mechanism:** It is important to support development of gender sensitive plans and programs and climate finance for gender sensitive interventions through regular data collection, monitoring, evaluation, reporting and impact assessment. At the same time, modify the existing programs and policies to response to the needs articulated by the community women. This can be ensured through confirming women's participation in planning and implementation at national and local level.

Recommendations:

While working with the partners and community people, particularly rural women, to address various impact of climate change, ActionAid believes the following approaches have proven effective:

Facilitating transformative actions: Post Disaster Response to Anticipatory Action:

The poorest and most powerless people in Bangladesh, women, are the most vulnerable to climate change. Parts of the country are subject to flooding, drought, cyclones, and the encroachment of salinity into freshwater sources. Women in Bangladesh are often marginalized and unaware of their rights or how to participate in their communities; this leaves them even more exposed to the effects of climate change. ActionAid's Resilience Framework promotes the idea of Absorptive Capacity, Adaptive Capacity and Transformative Capacity building of society, institutions, infrastructure, economy, and environment led by women and young people.

Anticipatory Actions for GBV/protection:

The term 'anticipatory action' refers to actions triggered before a crisis to mitigate the worst effects, or even avoid a crisis altogether. The basic paradigm shift is a move away from acting based on existing human needs (or suffering) to acting based on risk (and thus expected needs), which is underpinned by an informed idea of what the future might hold. Anticipatory action in the context of climate change can be very challenging especially since climate change impacts and its scales are uncertain.

For anticipatory actions for GBV/protection, ActionAid Bangladesh's focus of interventions are:

- Mitigate the impacts of GBV, menstrual health, maternal deaths for adolescent girls during and women of reproductive age (10 – 49 years).
- Prioritize the people living in poverty and exclusion living in flood prone areas.
- Women and girls of reproductive age, pregnant women, adolescents, youth who are at risk of gender-based violence.
- The 'left behind communities' such as the hijra community, sex workers and women with disability

- Women and girls to have access to lifesaving services related to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), Gender-Based Violence (GBV),
- Psychosocial Support (PSS) services for women and girls (adolescent and young women)

Facilitating Transformative Changes:

ActionAid Bangladesh is facilitating transformative changes through:

Women led Response to Recovery building Resilience

- Developing capacity building of women and young women in the communities vulnerable to climate change impacts to provide early warning and facilitate preparedness
- Leading actions including advocacy and campaign for recovery and resilience building

Facilitating institution building

- Women Friendly Spaces (WFS) in the 2 most flood affected districts
- Relevant government stakeholders, local NGOs are member of local GBViE networks.
- Coordination and liaison with local government, actors and stakeholder for timely and effective preparedness, response, and recovery

Mitigating GBV in Emergency Project

- Implementing 22 districts most vulnerable to climate change and associated impacts
- Through WFSs providing much-needed services for GBV survivors as well as midwifery support for pregnant mothers.
- Case workers and midwives from WFSs are providing support for referrals for the Anticipatory Pilot Project.

Conclusion:

To conclude it can be said that climate crisis offers a lens to understand intersecting forms of inherent injustices on this planet. Therefore, it is important to have gender equality—which is more than just equality between men and women—and human rights at the center of work to achieve climate justice.

ActionAid Bangladesh believes it is crucial to work for scaling up the efforts to bring transformational change in the society that would facilitates women’s leadership. Climate change itself and related policies are likely to have wide-ranging effects on gender relations, especially in developing countries. Poor women face several genders-specific barriers that limit their ability to cope with and adapt to a changing climate; these must be removed in the interests of both gender equity and adaptation efficiency. At the same time, gender analysis should be integral to the appraisal of public policies designed to reduce carbon emissions. Local and indigenous communities should be at the center of conversations around climate change. Women and the youth have a key role to play in seeking solutions. Their voices must be heard, and the solutions they propose should be considered and implemented. It must be recognized that investing in women led solutions is the pathway to achieve climate and gender justice. Therefore, policy formulation and program implementation cannot be done without women’s participation specially to address the impacts of climate change. There will be no climate justice without gender justice.