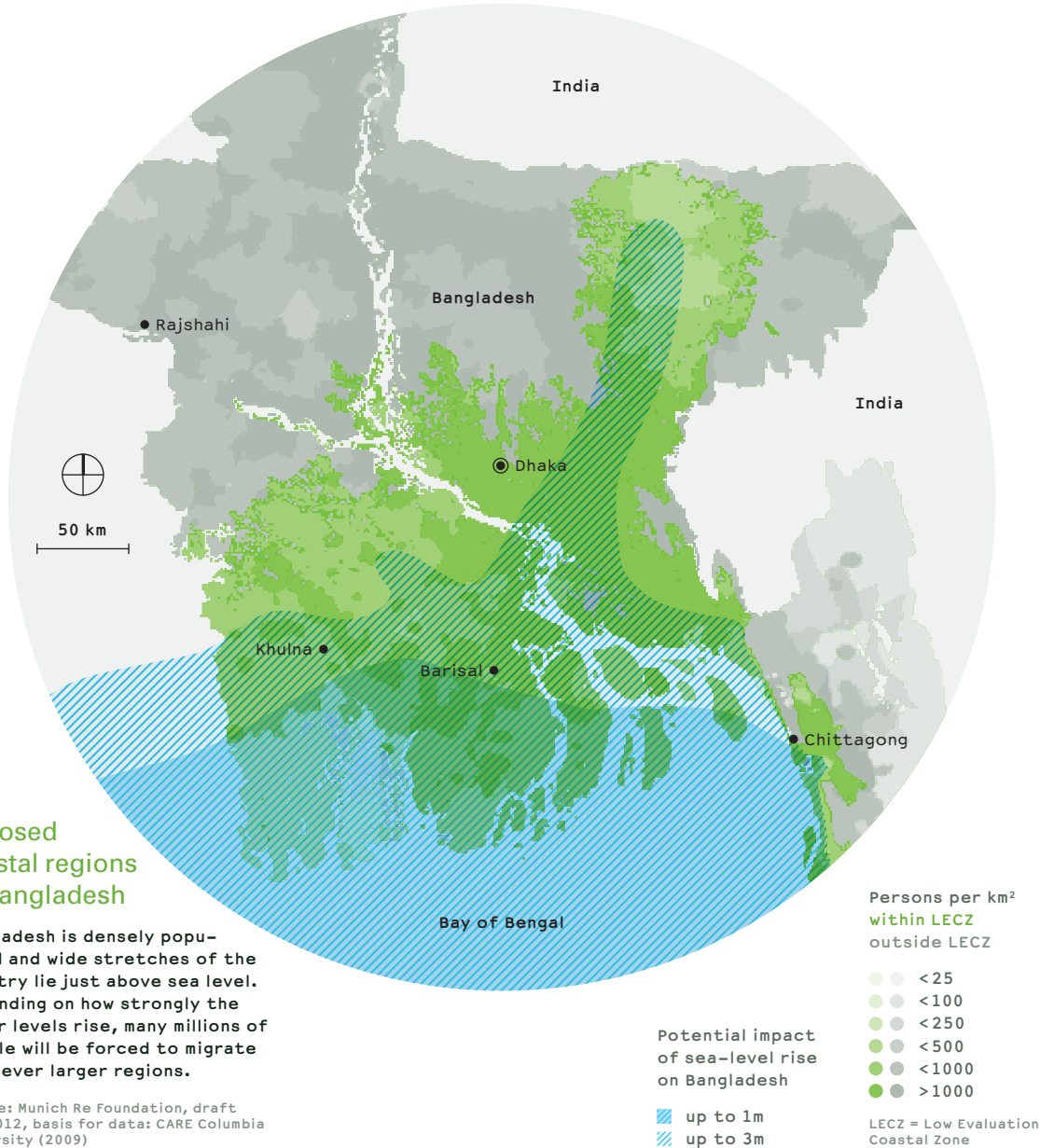


The villages in the enormous Ganges Delta stretching over the south of Bangladesh are often under water. Villagers in the Patuakhali District have learned to live with floodwaters.



South-South cooperation on adaptation to climate change



The adverse impacts of climate change are already being felt in countries in the developing world in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Some countries are taking the lead in combating those adverse impacts through adaptation. Bangladesh is one of the leading countries in this respect.





As one of the world's least developed countries, Bangladesh is highly vulnerable to a range of adverse impacts of climate change. While much of the country is susceptible to floods, other areas are prone to drought and the low-lying coastal areas to both cyclones and sea-level rise. Though vulnerable, Bangladesh is far from helpless in addressing the impacts of climate change. The government of Bangladesh is one of the first in the world to have developed a far-reaching national climate change strategy and action plan. The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan (BCCSAP), developed in 2009, is implemented with national financial and technical resources as well as support from the international community.

In addition, the country has put in place disaster reduction and early warning systems, which together have successfully evacuated over two million people during the two major cyclone events – Cyclone Sidr in 2007 and Cyclone Aila in 2009 – that have hit the country within the last few years. Although the damage to crops and infrastructure was still quite severe, the number of lives lost was reduced to a few thousand – compared with over 100,000 lives lost in a similar cyclone in 1991. The reduced loss of life can be attributed to risk reduction measures that include building cyclone shelters, enhancing knowledge of warning systems and developing sophisticated means of disseminating warnings through thousands of Red Cross and NGO volunteers. Bangladesh is famous for its cyclone shelters. These are usually built on pillars and capable of holding thousands of people. When not in use they often serve as community centres and schools. The country has erected 3,000 cyclone shelters, an incredible number. They have tremendously helped to reduce the loss and life from extreme events in coastal areas. Most of the fatalities in the last two cyclones were fishermen at sea who did not get back to shore in time, while over two million people on shore were successfully evacuated to cyclone shelters.

The Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan includes six pillars and over 40 action plans, which are being implemented by both government and non-government organisations. The programme is carried out using two funds. The first fund, to which the Government of Bangladesh has contributed over US\$ 350m, is called the Bangladesh Climate Change Trust Fund. The second fund, the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund, receives contributions from developed countries such as the United Kingdom, Sweden, Australia, from the European Commission, and from others.



Civil society can play a key role in the development and implementation of climate change strategies. In Bangladesh, civil society is leading the way in the development of adaptation strategies. Initiatives range from those that help empower the most vulnerable groups in society to devise their own adaptation strategies to those that assist communities in diversifying agricultural activities and procuring livestock to increase their income and reduce their vulnerability to droughts and floods.

South-South learning is the key

Bangladesh is promoting South-South learning on adaptation to climate change between Asia and Africa by sharing its experience with other developing countries. In many ways Bangladesh is providing a blueprint for other developing countries. Work on monitoring and evaluating community-based adaptation has started to attract the attention of NGOs in Africa, who are looking for a way to monitor and evaluate their own adaptation projects.

Another platform for South-South cooperation is the recently established International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD). Hosted at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB), ICCAD is a joint venture between the London-based International Institute for Environment and Development, the Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies and IUB. The institute has already delivered a series of training courses for professionals from Asia and Africa on various aspects related to climate change adaptation. ICCAD currently has over 200 alumni from over 30 countries throughout Asia and Africa.

In the future, all countries, both developing and developed, will increasingly have to face the adverse impacts of climate change. Thus, South-North as well as South-South cooperation and exchange should be increasingly employed, as many of the rich countries can also learn lessons from Bangladesh.

—
For further information on this issue:
centers.iub.edu.bd/icccad

Saleemul Huq

is a Senior Fellow at the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED) in London. The expert for climate change and development is also Director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) in Dhaka, Bangladesh.

Necessity is the mother of invention: children on the Brahmaputra River travel to school on a simple raft. During monsoon season, it is the only way of arriving in class with comparatively dry feet.

