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COP30: A MILESTONE MARKED BY MISSED CHANCES

by Selim Raihan

When the 30th session of the COP30 concluded on November 22, 2025, in Belém, Brazil, many left the Amazon-flanked venue with a sense that the summit had once again delivered more promise than payoff. On paper, the so-called Belém Package, a bundle of 29 decisions agreed by 195 Parties, seemed to signal a renewed commitment to climate action. But dig deeper, one sees glaring omissions - no binding roadmap to phase out fossil fuels, no firm plan to stop deforestation, and climate finance pledges that remain vague at best.

From the perspective of many vulnerable countries, among them Bangladesh, COP30 underscores just how creaking the traditional COP model has become. Consensus politics, once hailed as the global vehicle for climate cooperation, seems increasingly ill-suited to the urgency of our planet's crisis. If the world continues to lean solely on this old mechanism, the gap between climate ambition and climate reality will only widen.

What COP30 Delivered, and What It Left Unresolved

COP30 was not entirely barren of achievements. The summit adopted the Belém Package, committing, in principle, to a “tripling” of climate adaptation finance by 2035. For countries such as Bangladesh, which is already experiencing climate-induced floods, cyclones, salinity intrusion, and river erosion, this signal of increased support for adaptation could provide a lifeline. A new Just Transition Mechanism (JTM) was formalised that also sees, for the first time under the UN climate framework, technical assistance and capacity building pledged as well as support for a just transition to low-carbon economies. The global “Global Mutirão” spirit, invoking collective action, suggests that COP negotiators intend to shift from mere symbolic pledges to more implementation-focused cooperation. There was also renewed emphasis on nature, land, forests, agriculture, and inclusive climate action that centers communities and vulnerable populations.

Yet, the summit's two highest-stakes issues, fossil fuel phaseout and deforestation, were effectively sidelined. Despite strong pressure from more than 80 countries to adopt a roadmap for phasing out coal, oil, and gas, powerful fossil-fuel producing countries blocked any binding language. Similarly, though the Amazon rainforest formed a potent backdrop to the summit, the deal lacked a credible global commitment to halt and reverse deforestation. In short, COP30 ended with many of the structural drivers of climate change, fossil fuels, and deforestation, untouched.

Moreover, the promise to triple adaptation finance remains vague - no baseline was defined, the timeline stretches to 2035, and there is no clarity yet on who will foot the bill or how. For countries already beleaguered by climate shocks, such an open-ended commitment may feel too little, too late.

Why This Matters for Bangladesh

For a low-lying, deltaic country like Bangladesh, with a high climate exposure factor, COP30's outcome is a bitter pill. On the one hand, the adjusted focus on climate finance, adaptation, and just transitions provides some glimmer of hope. As floods and cyclones get worse, and shorelines retreat, stronger adaptation finance can translate into better flood-protection infrastructure, early warning systems for disasters, climate-resilient agriculture, and social support for vulnerable communities. If the JTM were paired with actual resources, it could provide a means to transition away from climate-vulnerable livelihoods toward more resilient economic activities, especially in coastal areas and flood plains.

But what this implies is that unless the global community addresses the root causes, fossil fuel dependency, and ecosystem destruction, we are only rearranging deck chairs on a sinking ship. Bangladesh's vulnerability does not end with adaptation - long-term survivability depends on a deep reduction in global emissions and ecosystem protection worldwide. Without a fossil-fuel phase-out or forest-protec-

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tion guarantees, the greenhouse gas burden will continue rising, sea levels will keep climbing, and extreme weather will worsen.

The Limits of Consensus, the Promise of Climate Clubs

The stalemate at COP30 reveals the Achilles heel of the traditional COP model - unanimity. As long as fossil-fuel producing countries can veto any binding commitment, the process will at best produce bland compromises. From this perspective, expecting meaningful global transformation through this mechanism feels like relying on miracles.

However, an alternate path may now be emerging, one that does not rely on global consensus but on flexible alliances. Some countries from COP30 have already indicated they will pursue fossil-fuel transition and forest-protection roadmaps outside the formal UN process, via “climate clubs” or coalitions of the willing. What this means is that progress might come not from universal consensus, but from a network of countries ready to act together.

For Bangladesh, this brings both opportunities and challenges. A climate club approach might offer a more direct path to decarbonization, technology transfer, and financing - particularly through partnered action with developing countries that suffer from the climate. But it also comes with risks. Will these alliances prioritise countries of economic or strategic weight, to the exclusion of countries like Bangladesh? And what if “club climate action” ends up exacerbating just the sort of global inequalities that it is trying to overcome?

If we are to benefit, then Bangladesh, in collaboration with regional partners, must proactively engage with these emerging coalitions. We need to ensure that climate clubs are inclusive and align with the interests of vulnerable nations. Otherwise, the shift in global governance may leave us behind.

From COP30 to Bangladesh's Climate Strategy: What Should We Do?

COP30 shows that climate politics is evolving, but slowly. For Bangladesh, the summit should be a wake-up call - adaptation financing pledges are welcome, but cannot substitute for mitigation; consensus-driven diplomacy may stall when the stakes are highest; and new forms of cooperation, flexible, coalition-based, action-oriented, may produce more real change.

First, policymakers and civil society in Bangladesh should treat the COP30 adaptation pledge as a starting gun. They must engage immediately with multilateral funds, humanitarian agencies, and development partners to shape how adaptation financing will reach vulnerable communities. There is a narrow but real opportunity to secure funds for resilient infrastructure, climate-smart agriculture, and disaster management systems - investments that can save lives and livelihoods.

Second, Bangladesh must adopt a dual-track climate strategy, strengthen adaptation and social protection on one hand, while pursuing decarbonisation and integration with emerging climate-club frameworks on the other. Our export-oriented industries, manufacturing, RMG, and energy, should be pulled into a low-carbon transition early, leveraging the rising global demand for greener supply chains.

Third, at the regional and global level, Bangladesh must join forces with other climate-vulnerable countries to pressure climate clubs to prioritize equity and inclusion. These should not be new venues for climate colonialism, but spaces for technology transfer, financial assistance, and shared adaptation-mitigation action planning. The country's diplomacy should embody this necessity.

Finally, Bangladesh should continue building its internal capacities in climate governance, climate-disaster risk management, renewable energy deployment, and social protection. Unless we build domestic resilience and adaptive capacity, external promises, even genuine ones, will not suffice.

Dr Selim Raihan, Professor of Economics, University of Dhaka and Executive Director, SANEM. Email: selim.raihan@gmail.com

CLIMATE CHANGE AND AGRICULTURE IN BANGLADESH: BRIDGING NDC 3.0 AMBITIONS WITH COP30 FINANCING COMMITMENTS

by Shafa Tasneem

One of the central issues raised at the COP30 conference was adaptation financing. In the context of Bangladesh, agriculture emerges as the sector demanding the highest priority in adaptation financing.

Agriculture is a climate-sensitive sector that plays a role in sustaining a large number of families in Bangladesh. The sector stands as a key pillar of Bangladesh's economy. In the financial year 2023-24, the sector contributed 11.55% of the GDP and 44.42% of the employment. Due to its susceptibility to climate variability, climate change has a direct and indirect impact on food security by lowering agricultural productivity and reducing the nutritional quality of food. The sector also contributes to anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. The sector is highly intensified as it produces up to three rice crops annually, which produces a significant amount of methane, a major greenhouse gas. In the base year 2022, the AFOLU (agriculture, forestry, and other land use) sector accounted for 37.83% of total GHG emissions,

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of which agriculture and livestock contributed to 17.04% and 18.37% of total emissions, respectively.

However, Bangladesh's vulnerability to climate risk is far greater than its contribution to global GHG emissions. The country ranks 7th in the climate risk index with a Climate Risk Index score of 28.33. Different regions of Bangladesh face different climate change phenomena in Bangladesh such as flood, drought, cyclone, excess rainfall, salinity intrusion, sea level rise, and high temperature. Climate-related disasters caused the loss of over 250,000 hectares of harvestable land and 850,000 households. Moreover, studies show that crop failure due to the loss of agricultural land caused a 30% spike in rice prices between 2014 and 2021. A report by The World Bank stated that one-third of Bangladesh's agricultural GDP can be lost owing to extreme events due to climate change.

To combat the challenges related to climate change and food security in Bangladesh, the government has taken various actions. Various national plans for adaptation and mitigation for climate change-related impacts have been drafted. One of the major policy documents is the Nationally Determined Contributions (NDC). Bangladesh published

its 3rd NDC in September 2025, before COP30. NDC 3.0 was followed by Intended NDC in 2015 and NDC 2.0 in 2021. The document outlines the climate action plans and emission reduction targets of Bangladesh. NDCs are one of the major products of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

Bangladesh provides a transparent and measurable contribution to Global Stocktake (GST1) through NDC 3.0, with advancing adaptation plans, strengthening mitigation ambition, enhancing transparency, etc. It integrates adaptation measures across agriculture, water, health, forestry, disaster management, and urban development to reduce vulnerability of communities, ecosystems, and critical infrastructure. The document has set some targets to reduce carbon emissions in sectors, including AFOLU. A total of 11.46% reduction in emissions has been set in the AFOLU sector by 2035, among which 3.46% reduction is under unconditional targets, and 8.00% is under conditional targets (subject to international support – grant, concessional loan, carbon trading/financing). In the AFOLU sector, the target for the agriculture sector is a 10.13% reduction (3.08% under unconditional and 7.06% under the conditional scenario) in GHG emissions.

The national policies and strategies advocate for adopting a high rate of climate-smart agriculture through technological advancement like IoT for precision agriculture, training of farmers for large scalability of climate-smart irrigation techniques, extension services to farmers for awareness in daily farming choices, etc. In agriculture, actions include scaling up Alternate Wetting and Drying (AWD) in rice cultivation – bringing around 30% of rice cultivation under AWD irrigation, expanding short-duration rice varieties, promoting precision fertilizer application, etc., have been highlighted in NDC 3.0. For livestock, the focus is on feed management to improve animal diets and manure management through biogas, vermicompost, and biochar solutions.

In its efforts to take up adaptation actions, the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has undertaken research to develop crop varieties resilient to drought, cold, waterlogging, pests, diseases, and salinity (e.g., drought-tolerant BRRI Dhan 42; flood-tolerant BRRI Dhan 51; stress-tolerant BARI Gom 25, etc.). NDC has also identified agriculture as one of the major thematic sectors aligning with the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) 2023-2050. The adaptation priorities include augmentation of surface water for irrigation and multipurpose use, development of agrofood processing industries based on climate-sensitive crop zoning, strengthening and development of early warning systems, and data management for agriculture, etc.

To implement the adaptation priorities, Bangladesh's strong call for international support in terms of financing at COP30 is critical. The adaptation investment requirement is around USD 12-14 billion by 2035. This is a huge amount for a country emitting less than 0.5% of the global GHG emissions. While a small part of the need will be financed through domestic funding, the scale of impacts of climate

change on Bangladesh, especially the agriculture sector, requires international solidarity. Without expanded opportunities for technology transfer, dedicated regional cooperation like South-South cooperation, capacity building, enhanced Green Climate Fund disbursement, Bangladesh's ambitious adaptation plan risks remaining on paper

In this case, the COP30 negotiators' call for triple climate adaptation financing gives a glimmer of hope for countries like Bangladesh. However, the promise must translate into action. A persistent gap is observed between approved and disbursed climate finance across South Asia. A report by Climate Watch states that South Asian countries only managed to disburse 51% of allocated adaptation finance between 2017-2021. This underscores the need for streamlined mechanisms. For Bangladesh's agriculture sector that requires immediate investments in climate-smart irrigation systems, stress-tolerant crop varieties, early warning systems, and agro-processing infrastructure, delayed financing means continued crop failures, rising food prices, and deepening vulnerability. The success of NDC 3.0 ultimately depends on whether the promises made in Belem translate into concrete financial and technical support for the nations on the frontlines of the climate crisis.

Shafa Tasneem, Research Associate, SANEM
Email: shafa.tasneem211@gmail.com

FROM EMISSIONS TO ACTIONS: TRANSPORT COMMITMENTS IN BANGLADESH'S NDC 3.0

by Fariha Khan

Every day, commuters in major cities in Bangladesh navigate heavy traffic, surrounded by toxic exhaust fumes. As the country's economy grows and urbanization intensifies, the demand for transportation has been rising. It is estimated that 3.2 million two-and-three-wheelers will be added between 2020 and 2050. The expanding transport sector has become a major source of air pollution and Green House Gas (GHG) emissions. The transport sector is responsible for 15% of the country's total emissions. The heavy reliance on fossil fuels, combined with insufficient public transport infrastructure and limited sustainable alternatives, have led to a rising trend in the CO₂ emissions by the transport sector in Bangladesh.

As a signatory to the Paris Agreement, Bangladesh has been taking proactive measures to reduce its emission levels. A key element of this activity is the development of Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs), which Bangladesh has been preparing since 2015. At COP30 held in Brazil this year, Bangladesh has presented its third NDC, a political document outlining its commitment for moving towards a sustainable future. The transport sector, a central component of Bangladesh's climate strategy, remains a key focus of the NDC 3.0.

In 2022, Bangladesh emitted 252.04 million tonnes of CO₂ equivalent (MtCO₂eq). In response, Bangladesh has set ambitious emission reduction targets in its new NDC, positioning the transport sector as a key actor. Bangladesh has committed to reducing transport sector emissions by 7.74% unconditionally and 14.04% conditionally (subject to international support) by 2035. It presents a unique opportunity to not only address the challenges threatening the transport sector, but also to position the sector as a key driver of low-carbon growth and path to sustainability.

For the transport sector, Bangladesh has largely focused on mitigation measures. In the NDC 3.0, the sectoral priorities include the improvement of fuel efficiency, enhancing the transition to a less carbon-emitting transport system, and a modal shift. It sets specific priorities for road and the rail sector. For the road sector, the focus is on increasing electric vehicle (EV) penetration in the public fleet, aiming to transform 30% of passenger cars and 25% of Dhaka's buses to electric by 2035 in the unconditional and conditional scenario, respectively. The NDC further prioritizes a modal shift to MRT and BRT lines. For the rail sector, priority actions include improving fuel efficiency and electrification, and installing solar energy plants on at least 30% of the railway owned land. These commitments are backed by existing national policies such as the Automobile Industry Development Policy, Electric Vehicle Charging Guideline, and the National Integrated Multimodal Transport Policy.



BANGLADESH'S TRANSPORT SECTOR STANDS AT A CRITICAL JUNCTURE, WHERE THE SHIFT TO GREEN MOBILITY IS NO LONGER A CHOICE BUT A NECESSITY FOR CLIMATE-FOCUSED AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



The NDC emphasizes moving towards a sustainable transport system based on a combination of measures for promoting e-mobility, expanding mass transit and rail electrification, strengthening inland waterways and encouraging walking and cycling. However, some critical gaps remain. The attention has mostly been paid to the road sector. Despite a large and vibrant inland water transport sector providing cheaper and more environmentally friendly solutions to travelling, the sector continues to remain ignored. Although the NDC outlines several priorities at the policy level, no specific measures or targets have been included for the promotion of the water transport sector in the current NDC.

With a primary focus on mitigation, measures for adapting to climate change impacts in the transport infrastructure and services remain ignored. The transport infrastructure in Bangladesh is subject to high risks, especially the road sector. In 2023, climatic hazards were estimated to cause an annual loss of US\$179 million to the road and rail infrastructure. However, no initiative has been mentioned in the NDC for adapting to the increasing vulnerability.

One of the key challenges in implementing the NDC is the lack of adequate finance. At COP30, the global emission from the transport sector has received a key focus. However, the sector continues to be affected by significant scarcity in financing, facing the largest investment gap as the recipient of 29% of the global climate finance. Although Bangladesh has taken initiatives at the domestic level to mobilize finances, without sufficient international support, the goals for a green transport sector cannot be realized.

Despite many limitations, Bangladesh continues to take measures for moving towards a just and equitable transport system. NDC 3.0 has introduced a “just transition” framework for promoting a people-centric approach. Key actions include the expansion of public transport, adopting electric buses, three wheelers and passenger cars, and supporting affected groups through micro-credit, scrap-page incentives, and training in EV charging and maintenance for drivers and owners of traditional vehicles for incentivizing the shift to cleaner vehicles. Furthermore, the NDC seeks to ensure safe mobility for women, elderly, and Persons with Disability (PWD) through a universal design in MRT/BRT lines and in EV charging stations. It further emphasizes the need for introducing women and disability friendly transport policies, and for promoting female employment in the sector. Besides this, the NDC prioritizes involving children and youth for promoting a modal shift, by encouraging cycling, walking, and utilization of public transport among the group.

Furthermore, NDC 3.0 now places focus on recovery from the loss and damage as a response to climate change. Bangladesh, as one of the most vulnerable countries to climatic risks, has now expressed its commitments to deal with the loss and damages. The proposed activities for averting, minimizing and addressing the loss and damage have been laid out through nine strategic pillars. Although none of the priority areas explicitly mention the vulnerability of the transport sector, it can be addressed by developing tools and methods for assessing the nature of the loss and damage and identifying the required approaches to solve them. These actions will only be implemented subject to financing from countries with higher contributions to climate change, however, this can be an important step for ensuring the infrastructural quality of the transport sector.

Bangladesh's transport sector stands at a critical juncture, where the shift to a low-carbon transport system is no longer a choice but a necessity for climate-focused and sustainable development. The commitments outlined in NDC 3.0 signal the country's focus on the shift towards green mobility. However, fulfilling these commitments will require coordinated efforts from public and private sectors as well as the international actors. Furthermore, although existing policies provide pathways for ensuring sustainability in the sector, it is necessary to ensure their implementation to transform the outlined plans into reality.

Fariha Khan, Research Associate, SANEM, Email: kfarihar10@gmail.com