



A Life Marked by Loss and Damage— My Story from Bangladesh

By
Ahsan Habib Saimon



A story on Lived Impact of The
Climate Crisis in Bangladesh



Photo by The Independent

Intense rainfall strained the city's fragile infrastructure, flooding streets and bringing our lives to a standstill. For my family and me, every monsoon brought fear of disease, damage, and sometimes even losing what little belongings we had.

When I was nine years old, living in Dhaka, I witnessed the aftermath of one of the most devastating cyclones in Bangladesh's history—Cyclone Sidr.

Though it struck the coastal regions hardest, claiming 3,406 lives, injuring over 55,000, and affecting nearly 9 million people, its impact reached even the capital.



Phot by Anadolu Ajansi.jpg

I was born in 1998 in Lakshmipur, Chattogram division of Bangladesh—a region at the forefront of the effects of climate change. That same year, a massive flood swept through the country, submerging over 75% of Bangladesh, claiming more than a thousand lives, and affecting over 30 million people. Our family, like many others, felt the brunt of nature's wrath—forced to leave behind our ancestral home. That flood drove us to seek refuge in Dhaka, the capital, where my parents hoped we might find stability, safety, and better opportunities.

Our move to Dhaka marked the beginning of a life constantly shaped by climate-induced loss. Growing up in Dhaka, I encountered an environment that seemed to be deteriorating daily. Pollution choked the air, heat waves became an unwavering pattern, and extreme weather oscillated unpredictably.

Every summer was hotter than the last, and every monsoon was heavier, every day filled with the suffocating noise and dust of an overcrowded city.



Photo by BDnews 24

Late that evening, as the storm surged, I remember the torrential rain and fierce winds that shook our windows, but it was the aftermath that left an indelible mark on me. The next morning, the city was submerged. The receding flood waters reached above my waist and remained for nearly a month, contaminated with sewage, plastics, household debris, and rotting waste. Among the chaos, I vividly recall seeing a large dead snake floating nearby—a sight that filled me with both fear and fascination as I stood just a few feet away. Wading through the dirty water, I experienced a fungal infection on my feet, while many others in my neighborhood suffered from waterborne illnesses like diarrhea.

Schools were closed indefinitely, and my life came to a standstill. With no place to play or even step outside, we were stuck at home. My mother constantly reminded me to stay indoors for safety, her voice filled with worry as she tried to shield me from the dangers beyond our doors. Yet, the flood seemed inescapable, seeping into every corner of life and leaving behind a trail of destruction and despair. Even as a child, I could feel the weight of the tragedy—not just in the physical damage but in the lives that were forever altered.



University brought me to Khulna in 2018, a coastal region bearing even deeper scars from the impacts of climate change. The saline intrusion into rivers and soil, rising sea levels, displacement of communities, and daily struggles for clean drinking water were part of life here. By meeting local farmers, I learned how they battled these forces, witnessing their crops perish as the salt crept inland.

Frequent inland flooding forces families to abandon their homes and possessions, fleeing to uncertain new locations in search of safety. These were people who once experienced stability but now faced endless cycles of displacement and rebuilding. During the COVID-19 pandemic, I found myself reflecting on how we could contribute to society in such uncertain times. Determined to make a difference, I connected with my friends and proposed an initiative to develop projects to enhance our skills while creating a meaningful impact.



We formed two teams, each with its own focus. Our team participated in a national event named “Mujib 100 ideas 2021” which turned its attention to addressing a pressing issue—the year-round food insecurity faced by 1.2 million marginalized people living in the sandbar communities of Bangladesh. We conceptualized a project designed to empower these communities with sustainable solutions for food security and economic stability.

Out of thousands of entries, our project stood out, earning a place among the top 100 ideas in the country and receiving appreciation from the Government of Bangladesh. Despite our enthusiasm and the recognition we received, the challenges of the pandemic and a lack of funding hindered our ability to implement the project. Yet, this experience shaped my perspective profoundly.

It highlighted the critical need for financial resources to address climate-induced challenges faced by vulnerable communities. It also strengthened my belief that polluters, as the primary contributors to climate change, must bear the cost of the resulting loss and damage. From 2019 to 2022, while living in Khulna, I experienced the relentless wrath of cyclones—Fani, Bulbul, Amphan, Yaas, and Sitrang.

These storms ravaged the region, uprooting homes, displacing millions, and devastating agricultural lands. Each storm left scars—on the land and in our hearts. During Cyclone Yaas in 2021, I was residing in the residential hall of Khulna University. As the cyclone approached, fear and anxiety gripped us. The power went out—unheard of in the university halls—and the storm raged outside with howling winds and pounding rain. Before noon, the dining hall had run out of food, and the nearby hotels were closed a day before.



Photo by EU



Hunger added to my frustration, forcing me to rely on dry food. I managed to buy earlier, unsure how long it would last. That night, sleep was impossible. The storm's fury rattled our windows, and we sat awake, helpless against the chaos outside. By morning, our beloved campus was unrecognizable—trees uprooted, branches scattered, and the once-familiar scenery transformed into a bleak, disheveled landscape.

It took days to clear the debris, but longer still to rebuild the sense of normalcy in our lives. No words could express the helplessness we felt in those moments, knowing that these extreme events were only becoming more frequent. Even in moments meant for rest or study, the weight of these disasters lingered, a constant reminder that the battle for survival was no longer distant—it had woven itself into the fabric of our everyday lives.



In 2023, I returned to Dhaka to pursue my Master's degree, leaving Khulna to escape its relentless climate vulnerabilities. Yet, in Dhaka, I found a new set of climate-related challenges. The city, already struggling with overpopulation, now faced intensified flooding, waterlogging, severe heatwaves, outbreaks of waterborne diseases, and mosquito-borne illnesses such as dengue, malaria and chikungunya.

My family and I have been repeatedly affected by dengue, Chikungunya, and respiratory illnesses, which now feel like seasonal inevitabilities as we struggle against the relentless health impacts of shifting environmental conditions.

Each chapter of my life has been shaped by loss and damage—whether to my home, my health, or a sense of security. My story is one of millions across Bangladesh—a country that ranks seventh in terms of vulnerability to climate change.



The ongoing impacts of climate change have reshaped my path and my identity, evolving me from a victim into an advocate. My story is not unique; it is part of a shared collective experience felt by countless others in Bangladesh. Through this story, I aim to amplify our voices—the voices of those who can no longer return to a home lost to floods, of those who brave each cyclone knowing it could be their last, and of those who continue to fight for a sustainable future despite the harsh realities of climate loss and damage.

We are not merely statistics; we are people living through these impacts firsthand, enduring real losses, and bearing witness to the urgent need for immediate, meaningful action. Our resilience is not just a survival instinct; it is a call to action for the world to recognize our struggle and rise to the challenge.