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Questionnaire in relation to Human Rights Council resolution 47/24 on Human Rights and Climate Change

Contribution by FRIENDSHIP NGO, Bangladesh

1. Please describe the impacts of the adverse effects of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations. Where possible, please share specific examples and stories.

Bangladesh's geographical location makes the country extremely prone to the climate crisis, one of the most affected countries, it ranked seventh the Climate Risk Index 2021. Located in a low-lying delta, Bangladesh is formed by its 310 named rivers of which 57 are trans-boundary, including the rivers Ganges, Brahmaputra and Meghna. The country is locked between the Himalayas in the North and the Bay of Bengal in the South. With a population density of 1,033 per km², Bangladesh is the most densely populated country besides the city-states. It is the country with maximum number of people to be impacted by the climate change.

Cyclones are becoming more frequent and unpredictable in Southern Bangladesh. Although lives are saved due to preparedness through cyclone shelters, early warnings and better immediate actions, the loss of houses, crops and livelihood sets them back economically, socially, and mentally to starting point every year. How does one have hope or ability to restart life over and over again, through actions which are beyond their control?

Floods occur annually in unprecedented numbers over the last few years, stronger, more voluminous, and more prolonged in Northern regions of Bangladesh. Floods affecting 25-30% of the country are normal and beneficial for the environment, ecology, and crops. Nowadays, when 60% of the country is continuously affected for months, serious displacements are caused, including loss of lives and livelihoods. Once again restarting, rebuilding annually causes hopelessness impacting any serious development or economic growth. Help in the sense of aid relief cannot compensate systemic disaster upon a family or community.

In Southern regions, saline affected land, due to sea level rise and embankments breaking, has increased by 26% between 1973 and 2009, affecting 35 million people¹. Salinity levels heavily affect the crops, drinking water and health. E.g., nutrition levels decrease due to the lack of variety in food, women in these areas are more likely to miscarry, and hidden issues like child marriage social ostracism, mental health, abuse, all increase.

Due to the increasing intensity of floods and standard water levels (due to sea levels and meltwater), land erosion leads to displace minimum 50,000 to 200,000 people each year. Also, roads, embankments, bridges, infrastructure of education, communication i.e., ICT, electricity, inaccessibility to the available services all contribute enormously to the any growth of socio economic within communities.

Droughts especially afflict the Northwest of Bangladesh and cause agricultural losses, affecting the yield and food security. Nationwide droughts occur approximately every five years. Droughts impact land degradation, livestock population, health, and employment.

All of this has a direct impact on the quality of lives especially for the people living in these regions which comprises more than 60% of the country. Seasonal, temporary, permanent migration is increasing in these areas due to climate change. More men than women migrate to other places from these areas, and thus women and children are left behind and fall victim to vulnerable, hazardous situation.

¹ To note: no currents records are available officially, but certainly due to increase in demography, lack of maintenance of embankments, deforestation of mangroves and human expansion into forested or protected areas, has increased the percentage of impact significantly



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Women and girls are disproportionately affected by climate change. In the cyclone disaster of 1991, for example, 90% of the 140,000 people who died in the country were women. They are often confined to roles and jobs that make them more reliant on natural resources. Because they face barriers in accessing financial or technical resources or are denied land ownership, they are less able to adapt to climate change, to recover after disasters and hence globally more vulnerable.

Climate change takes away basic human rights and amplifies the trouble of accessing the right to life, right to health, housing, education, water, sanitation, access to legal or financial services, and for the most vulnerable communities, they are unable to find a platform for even restarting life.

Some stories collected in communities served by Friendship:

- (i) Mashkura lives in a remote village near Sundarbans, in the Bay of Bengal. Happy childhood, later a happy marriage, until sea level rose, embankments broke, salinity from the sea spread inland, impacting lives dramatically. No one repaired the embankment and over 6 years, Mashkura had 3 miscarriages, and all dreams were shattered. She was abandoned by her shrimp farmer husband and then faced social ostracism. Mashkura was a victim of salinity.
- (ii) Bonomali Mondol, 65 years, withered, suffering, looks 100. Silently sits, looking at miles and miles of saline water, grey dying trees and reminiscences of his once flourishing green fields and happy life, before Cyclone Aila had struck in 2009. Years have passed in poverty.
- (iii) Nupur 14, lives in the North on the banks of the mighty river Brahmaputra. She is one of the 5 daughters of a day labourer, Quyyum, of Char Dewali Khola. They live hand to mouth, having to shift homes several times over the last 10 years, victims of repetitive floods and river erosion.
- (iv) The food crisis among poor households started to increase at the end of March 2020. One night, a resident of Char Holokhana, Kurigram Md. Sahidul Islam called Enamul, a Friendship Community Paralegal seeking relief, mentioned that a family neighbour has not eaten all day today. Shahidul provided food support to Joynal's family. But this cannot be continued as Shahidul himself is worried about providing food to his own family. Shahidul also informed that Joynal left the house in the morning in search of food and had not come back. As there was not much stock of food in the food bank, the paralegal contacted other members in a nearby community. Through word of mouth among the paralegals and local authorities, a fellow member, Md. Rafiqul Islam bought rice, pulses, pumpkin, and potatoes for five hundred takas and gave it to Md. Joynal. Through similar sources, Friendship Community Paralegal Enamul of Holokhana Char got to know about six more households (having a total of 32 members) in the community who were starving for more than a day. Paralegals distributed 5kg rice, 2 kg potatoes, and 1kg salt to each household within a day. This snowballed into the creation of foodbanks, in more organised fashion where the community helped each other.
- (v) Molida was selected as one of the 10 members of disaster volunteer team in her village in Goynar Poto. She had been trained by Friendship in search and rescue and disaster management techniques. During the 2019 floods, the 19-year-old realised that her sick and disabled neighbours were in danger of being drowned. She took help from her volunteer team to build a banana raft. With some assistance from her mother she managed to rescue 45 vulnerable people. In a conservative rural community a woman is not easily expected to do what she did, but she never hesitated.

2. Please describe any specific policy, legislation, practice or strategy that your Government has undertaken, in compliance with applicable international human rights law, to promote an approach to climate change mitigation and adaptation, as well as loss and damage that ensures the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations. Please also note and identify any relevant mechanisms for ensuring accountability for these commitments including their means of implementation.

Human rights protection for the climate change impacted people is ambitious especially for countries facing resource constraints and/or while other resident groups see their rights infringed upon and are not receiving adequate human rights support. Therefore, the concept of 'impacts of climate change on human rights' does not receive sufficient political and media attention.



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Victims of climate change are entitled to receive major human rights protection. This includes the right to housing, food, water, health services and the right to privacy as well. Yet, it is not recognised and acted upon, responsibly. They fall under development vulnerability not as a special community needing immediate action. Despite the recently raised civil society voices, they are very far from being given any mainstream recognition. In Bangladesh, violations to these rights are in theory guarded by forums such as the National Human Rights Commission Bangladesh (NHRCB). There are also some avenues in the criminal and civil legal system of Bangladesh to protect human rights violations. But displaced victims of climate change are a relatively new community, and thus their human rights are protected neither by the legal system of Bangladesh nor by the NHRCB. They fall under the legal protection of “*all citizens of Bangladesh are guaranteed the same human rights in the Constitution of Bangladesh*”. There has not been any effective legal protection reflected in practice for the climate impacted communities.

Out of the 64 districts of Bangladesh, 26 coastal and mainland districts are already sources of climate change-related displacement. The Government of Bangladesh is aware of this looming crisis, claiming that 20 million people could be displaced in Bangladesh by sea level rise alone over the next 40 years. There exist plans such as the 'National Action Plan on Adaptation' (NAPA) of 2005, and the 'Bangladesh Climate Change Strategy and Action Plan' (BCCSAP) of 2009. Through a combination of lack of political will and lack of financial and technical resources, there are currently no comprehensive mechanisms to provide support to people who have lost their homes, land, and property because of climate change. As a result, the rehabilitation of displaced persons by both government and non-government sectors is, to date, very limited. Importantly, livelihood problems remain after the rehabilitation of displaced persons. The fact that UN also does not yet class them as refugees, also means that help for them even after migration is limited.

However, there are progresses. During COP26 in Glasgow, in the Bangladesh Pavilion, the Government of Bangladesh has officially released its first National Strategy on Internal Displacement Management ([read here](#)). At the event, it was confirmed by specialists that Bangladesh is ahead of other countries. The country has already adopted rights-based strategy on the basis of international standards and spirit of climate justice. The new strategy upholds that internally displaced persons shall enjoy, in full equality, the same rights and freedoms under international and domestic laws as do other persons of the country.

Bangladesh is also the first country in the Climate Vulnerable Forum to launch a Climate Prosperity Plan, entitled the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan. It counteracts climate-induced damages and losses by equipping vulnerable communities, industry, and the government. This support optimized by financing tools and models, will be key to helping embrace a new risk management paradigm that would bring about resilience and stability, especially for small businesses, vulnerable populations, and the economy. But is yet to reach the most vulnerable. The Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan leverages the financing of the Eighth Five Year Plan 2021-2025 of Bangladesh, Vision 2041, and Bangladesh Delta Plan 2100 to unlock a pathway for a fast-tracked delivery of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 and GDP per capita growth commensurate to upper-middle-income status. Some of the key initiatives under this plan includes climate-resilient and nature-based agriculture and fisheries development, financial protection for Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises and climate-resilient well-being initiatives, which will all add significant depth to protecting human rights of climate impacted people.

The difficulty is in the fact that, though understood by the world and the country that actions are needed, it is easier to act around areas geographically where there is access and where there is visibility. Yet the millions of real impacted communities are usually not visible, geographically remote, and hence are totally left aside. Pilots are all done and redone again, only for and with those who are moderately impacted but more visible to the decision makers. Whilst those suffering the real hardships are often still ignored by all.

3. Please share a summary of any relevant data that captures how the adverse effects of climate change have affected people in vulnerable situations, taking into account multiple and intersecting forms of discrimination (i.e. discrimination based on a combination of multiple



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grounds, including disability, gender, race, colour, sex, language, religion, nationality and migration status).

Bangladesh has two cyclones and one flooding season, leading to recurring disasters on a yearly basis. Cyclones have a major impact on the population of Bangladesh: over the last 10 years, cyclones have affected more than one million people in the country when they make landfall in the southern coastal region. River erosion displaces 50,000 to 200,000 people each year and 60% of the country gets flooded each year.

UNICEF estimates that one in three children in Bangladesh, nearly 20 million children, bear the brunt of climate change every day. Children are victims of extreme weather, floods, river erosion, sea level rise, and other environmental shocks driven by climate change. Many end up adrift in city slums, their lives and prospects shattered. Millions of children are trapped in exploitive child labour, child marriage and trafficking.

A rise in sea levels and coastal erosion could lead to a loss of 17% of land surface and 30% food production by 2050. One-third of Bangladesh's population is estimated at risk of displacement because of rising sea levels. The Asian Development Bank estimated that Bangladesh may experience a 2% GDP annual loss by 2050 because of climate change – which will contribute to the income inequality of the country.

In Friendship NGO's working area, from our experience we have seen that there are plenty of issues that can be addressed better. We found that around 40% persons with disabilities could be cured if they had access to doctor when young. In just 80 river islands, our intervention helped stop hundred or more child marriages a year. 98,180 children were brought under immunization in a year in areas where the coverage increased from almost nil to 90% due to our presence and collaboration with the government.

4. Please describe any mechanisms and tools that are in place to measure and monitor the impacts of climate change on the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations.

Some examples of what Friendship does:

- Empowerment from the ground up: <https://friendship.ngo/what-we-do/empowerment/>
- Climate adaptation solutions: <https://friendship.ngo/what-we-do/climate-adaptation/>

All implemented through a wholistic approach. The Friendship Way can be found [via this link](#).

5. Please identify and share examples of good practices and challenges in the promotion, protection, and fulfilment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations in the context of the adverse effects of climate change.

Some of the most climate vulnerable people live in the northern river islands in Bangladesh, who frequently face internal displacement. Friendship NGO, working closely with the community since 2002, introduced legal booths and awareness raising on justice and human rights, working closely with the community members, local government and the legal system in the country. Unlike inhabitants of the mainland, river island dwellers cannot always access the public services or institutions they are entitled to. Friendship has been able to offer remote communities access to paralegals to whom community members can address their questions. The paralegals explain the basic legal, human and citizens' rights, and describe the means for protecting and obtaining these rights. They also help resolve common justice problems that community members face on a day-to-day basis. Women in river island communities often live in fear and endure gender-based and other forms of violence due to their inability to access judicial institutions. Friendship's Legal Booths and paralegals enable citizens to have easy and secure access to legal help to combat any infringement of their rights.

Story example. Jatrapur is a river island in Kurigram, Bangladesh. People living here are extremely marginalized and vulnerable, and constantly battle against natural calamity, poverty and social injustice. Rokaiya Akhter Shiulee is a 10-year old disabled child living in this char. Her



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parents are Rafiqul Islam and Beauty Begum. Although Rokaiya's parents have tried to apply for a disabled allowance for her in 2016, their attempt was unsuccessful as they did not have a disability certificate. In 2018, they got help from Friendship's paralegal Sumaiya Sarkar Misti in their island to retry getting enlisted for the allowance. The paralegal spoke to the parents and the local union council chairman. The chairman explained that all necessary paperwork must be completed to get a disability allowance and that Rokaiya would also need to be certified by a doctor. The paralegal then advised the parents on their next steps and coordinated the doctor's visit and preparation of paperwork for the enlistment. In July 2019, the disability card was finally approved, and she began receiving her due allowance from the following year. This allowance will be provided to her throughout her life and was made possible through her parent's efforts and coordination support from the Friendship Community Paralegal.

6. Please include examples and good practices that highlight international and multilateral cooperation and approaches that are implemented through close consultation with and active involvement of people in vulnerable situations.

The work of Friendship NGO is a good example of taking the voice from grassroots to foster international and multinational cooperation. The organisation has been working closely with the climate vulnerable population of the country since 2002. Working so intimately with the climate affected poor communities, puts Friendship in a position to be their voice. It has done so for example, at COP21, which was hosted in France in 2015, Friendship organised a side event "Managing the Human Impacts of Climate Change". Since 2019, Friendship partners with 'Gobeshona' of the International Centre for Climate Change (ICCCAD) for an international conference on climate knowledge at Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB). In 2020, Friendship was part of the Community-Based Adaptation conference. Friendship also collaborated with several ministries, the IFRC and the Shelter Cluster in Bangladesh to develop the "Standard Guideline for Rural Housing in Disaster Prone Areas of Bangladesh". The organisation has been involved in 16 events in COP26, taking suggestions, stories and videos from the forefront of climate change to the world.

7. Please provide any additional information you believe would be useful to support climate action that promotes the full and effective enjoyment of the human rights of people in vulnerable situations.

Increasing the resilience of the most vulnerable communities can have a direct impact on their human rights. To do so, a great step would be to spend 50% of the climate funding in helping people to adapt and remain in their communities. Indeed, whereas climate migration was mostly considered as an adaptation strategy of the most impacted people, there is more and more advocacy to consider climate migration as a direct consequence of the climate crisis and hence should be considered as loss and damage, which is still way under-funded. Therefore, it is important to integrate climate migration in green, resilient, and inclusive development plans to mitigate this risk for the populations.

A few web links:

- www.friendship.ngo
- [Runa Khan addresses the inaugural session of IOM's International Dialogue on Migration 2021](#)
- [Healthcare system for Climate Migrants](#)
- [For the climate, end the distinction between humanitarian aid and development aid](#)
- [A healthcare for all](#)
- [Education program evaluation](#)

And video links:

- [Friendship Overview](#)
- [Friendship Solar Village](#)
- [Ground Zero to Climate Adaptation](#)
- [Mangrove: A nature based solution](#)
- [Improving access to healthcare](#)
- [Transitional fund](#)