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National Delegation to the Conference of the Parties (COPs) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

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Abstract

Although criticized on management and outcome, attendance in environmental mega conferences has been continuously increasing. Recent Conference of the Parties (COP) of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) has hosted thousands of delegates. Climate vulnerable countries show similar trend in size of national delegation. Size of delegation team is positively correlated with the total population while environmental performance and political stability of the country do not influence the size of delegation team. In formation of state representatives, countries differ in their preferences to academic community, public and private sector, business community etc. Bangladesh, one of the highly climate vulnerable countries, shows some exceptions – participants from non-government organizations (NGOs) and private sectors are minimal, while political personality, irrespective of their level of expertise in relevant field, are substantial. It is proposed that UNFCCC should come up with some policy guidelines to ensure optimum assembly of academics, researcher, practitioners, government officials and private sector for countries to select delegation team for COPs.

Keywords: Conference of the Parties, United Nations, Climate Change, State and Non-state Representatives, Bangladesh.

1. Introduction

Climate change is nothing new to mankind. Human civilization has passed through several substantially long-term climatic changes in the past; the most recent ice age has lasted till 10,000 years ago. Changing weather patterns directly influence people and indirectly influence living of people through changes in quality and/or quantity of water, air, food, ecosystem etc. (Haque, et al., 2012). Until recently, pace of climate change has not been predicted to be as fast as it is now (Miah, et al., 2011). Development in the concept and knowledge of climate science, although last few decades have witnessed increasingly complex climate model, has provided evidence to the acceptance of the fact of anthropogenic influence on climate change. Scientists, nowadays, rely on the fact that while many factors are there to influence climate, human activities are dominant and are responsible for most of the warming happened during the last 50 years. Individual and/or collective human actions, for example, land use, deforestation and excessive consumption etc. increase generation of GHGs and consequently influence climate change (Bernstein et al., 2008).

Twenty years after the United Nations (UN) Conference on the Human Environment in Stockholm, the Earth Summit produced the Agenda 21 and Rio declaration. The Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992 has considered the voices of the global leaders to ensure a more sustainable living on the earth. After negotiation at the UN Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED), the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was opened for signature on 9 May 1992 which entered into force on 21 March 1994. There are 198 parties as of January 2014, among which three are observer states. Since 1995, the parties to the convention have been meeting annually at the Conference of the Parties (COP) held in different cities around the world. The primary purpose of COP is to bring global leaders, policymakers, scientists, researcher, civil societies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to discuss, develop, assess and negotiate on actions required to reduce the pace and impact of climate change and to adapt to obvious climatic changes which is mostly anthropogenic in nature. To date the parties have assembled for 19 sessions in different continents except Australia. Europe has hosted maximum number of COPs than any other continent. Europe and North America together hosted more than half of the sessions.

COP of UNFCCC has already been termed as 'Environmental Mega Conference' (Seyfang, 2003) which brings couple of thousand delegates

every year under a single roof, although the latest COP 19 in Warsaw has hosted only one third of what the world witnessed in COP 15 in Copenhagen where more than 24,000 delegates including media and observer organizations attended. Earlier there was no restriction to nominate number of representatives from observers. After 2010 only, observer organizations have been restricted to nominate representatives up to a certain limit to attend COP; yet the number of attendees has been swelling (Schroeder and Lovell, 2012; Neeff, 2013).

To ensure effective adaptation to and mitigation of climate change keeping other usual development activities smooth, linkage between development and climate change policies need to be explored (Halsnaes and Verhagen, 2007). In addition to core actions on adaption and mitigation, adequate policy instruments are necessary to enhance negotiation and knowledge sharing experiences which is mostly possible in environmental mega conferences like COP. If relevant and justified delegation team is not formed and maintained by the country, national interest may not be realized.

2. Research Objectives and Rationale

Although it is not guaranteed that more participation would ensure better decision and easier decision making process, study of the trend and pattern of participants would guide better allocation of resources for managing conferences. Hence, the primary objective of this research is to investigate how the most climate vulnerable countries respond to environmental conference, like COP of UNFCCC; how the size of national delegation team varies with the size of population and national gross domestic product (GDP); how the size of the delegation team is influenced by the level of corruption and political instability of the respective countries; and how the national environmental performance affects the size of state delegation team for COPs. The study also aims at analyzing the incomparable scenario of Bangladesh regarding participation and the composition of delegation team for COPs of UNFCCC. Finally, the study compares the size of the delegation team with that of other countries on selected indictors – geographic location, land area and population.

Earlier study took total number of attendees in COPs and considered participants from Europe and North America only for few statistical tests (Neeff, 2013). Schroeder et al. (2012) in their research on state representations in climate negotiations randomly selected few countries from the participating parties of COPs. The study selected seven countries

based on two specific climate change impacts – sea-level rise and storm surge as well as tropical deforestation, while many other impacts of climate change were unaddressed. In contrast, this study has considered overall risk of climate change and considered the most climate vulnerable countries based on a latest assessment done by Mapplecroft (2013).

As the countries in Europe and North America are among the highest emitters and donors as well, the view they possess and the issues they consider with regard to attendance in conferences related to climate change may not be similar to that of countries most vulnerable to climate change and instantaneously belong to the developing part of the world. Climate change issues in developing countries are deep-rooted in core economic development concern; institutional inefficiency and mismanagement along with other factors may increase vulnerability to climate change (Halsnaes & Verhagen, 2007). Unnecessary (or unfruitful) spending in any form, including attendance in environmental conferences, need to be conserved. Politically motivated selection of delegation team from state and non-state actors by the government should also be restricted. To ensure efficient utilization of resources with respect to delegation teams for upcoming sessions of COP a wise composition of academics, researchers, practitioners, government officials and political leaders is required.

3. Research Methodology

Mapplecroft (2013) assessed the vulnerability on the basis of three broad indicators – exposure to extreme climate-related events, sensitivity of population and adaptive capacity of countries to combat climate change, which is expected to provide wider aspect than considering only two impacts. Although there are other risk indexes, for example, World Risk Report 2011 prepared by United National University and different threats – drought, flood, storm, sea-level rise and agriculture – based rank of countries prepared by World Bank, Climate Change Vulnerability Index (CCVI) 2014, prepared by Mapplecroft (2013) has been chosen.

Ten countries with high-risk of climate change have been chosen from the CCVI 2014 (Maplecroft, 2013). The number of attendees during COP1-19 has been analyzed. UNFCCC provides list of participants for each session of COP from where the number of national participants has been taken. World Bank data has been used for land area, population and GDP. Relations of number of attendees with level of corruption, political instability and environmental performance have been investigated. Corruption perception

index for various years prepared by Transparency International (TI), political instability index prepared by the Economist and Environmental Performance Index (EPI) prepared by Yale University have been used for analysis.

The study has examined only the number of official delegation from Bangladesh. Experts who work in different organizations and have attended various sessions, not as a member of the official delegation of Bangladesh, are excluded from this study. Size of delegation team of other countries equal to or nearly same as Bangladesh in terms of land area (Suriname and Tajikistan), population (Nigeria and Russia) and geographic location (India and Myanmar) have also been compared. Suriname is the next bigger country to Bangladesh in terms of land area and Tajikistan is the next smaller.

4. Result and Discussion

4.1 Pattern of Participation

The world has witnessed a dramatic increase in the number of state and non-state representatives in COPs. Started with 757 delegates from parties and 2,044 individuals as observers (both from intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations) during COP1 in 1995, COP19 has hosted 4,011 individual delegates and a total of 3,695 individuals from observer organizations. COP15 in Copenhagen has hosted maximum number of participants with 10,583 individuals from 194 states and 13,482 individuals from observer organizations. The latest session in Warsaw, COP19, was more than five times bigger in terms of national participants and has hosted only less than one third of what the world witnessed in COP15 in Copenhagen where more than 27,000 delegates including media and observer organizations attended (Fisher, 2010). The most climate vulnerable countries have also been in similar trend as shown in Figure 1.

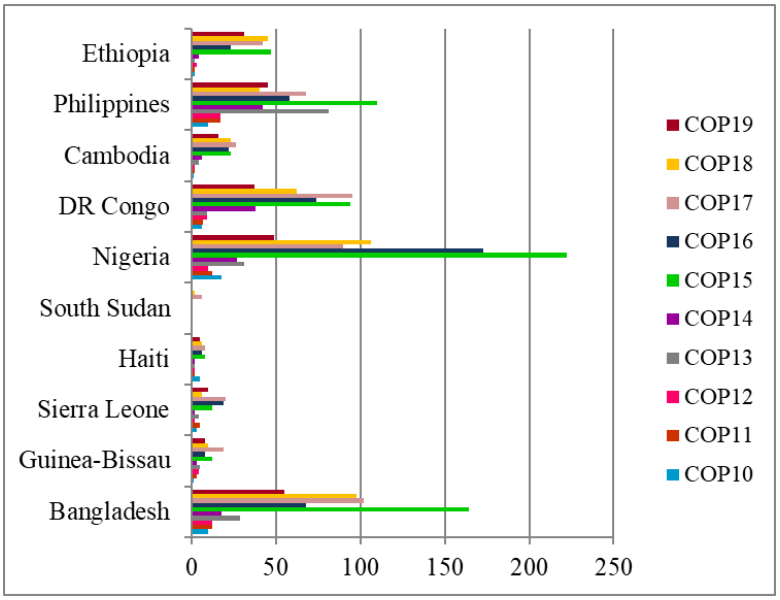

Figure 1: Representatives from the most vulnerable countries in COP10-19 of UNFCCC

During the last 10 years size of delegation for Nigeria and Bangladesh has been greater than any other vulnerable country. Participants from Democratic Republic of Congo and the Philippines are roughly in similar trend. Being a very new independent nation, South Sudan got the observer status and attended in COP17 and 18. COP15 shows significantly higher number of attendees for few of the countries except, Cambodia, Haiti, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau. Haiti is more stable compared to other countries in sending delegation to COPs keeping the number of delegates in single digit.

4.1.1. Trend in the Size of Delegation Team from Climate Vulnerable Countries

Composition and size of delegation teams for COPs are sole responsibility of each country; they are independent and not related to the composition and size of delegation teams of other countries. As the number of attendees in COP15 and COP16 are outliers, data failed normality test showing all of the ρ-values for Shapiro-Wilk test less than 0.05 and instigated nonparametric

test. This research has sample size of 10; hence, Kruskal-Wallis nonparametric test has been conducted and Table 1 shows the results.

Table 1: Kruskal Wallis test value for selected countries' representatives in COPs

Test Statistics[a,b]										
	Bangladesh	Guinea Bissau	Sierra Leone	Haiti	South Sudan	Nigeria	DR Congo	Cambodia	Philippines	Ethiopia
Chi-Square	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00	18.00
Df	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18	18
Asymp. Sig.	0.456	0.456	0.456	0.456	0.456	0.456	0.456	0.456	0.456	0.456
a. Kruskal Wallis Test b. Grouping Variable: COPs										

Since p-value for all countries tested is 0.456 which is greater than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis, thereby conclude that at $\alpha = 0.05$ level of significance, evidences are there to conclude that there is no difference among the median number of participants from different vulnerable countries under study.

In attempt to find out the correlation between number of participants in COPs with total population, GDP and GDP per capita, it has been revealed that for all countries, except for South Sudan, there are moderate to strong positive correlations, as shown in Table 2. South Sudan is among observer states and their values are not sufficient yet to conduct justified statistical test.

Table 2: Correlations of size of delegation teams with different factors

Country	Population	National GDP
Bangladesh	0.67	0.69
Guinea-Bissau	0.74	0.76
Sierra Leone	0.62	0.59
Haiti	0.67	0.68
South Sudan	0.44	0.41
Nigeria	0.58	0.61
DR Congo	0.77	0.75
Cambodia	0.79	0.86

Philippines	0.65	0.60
Ethiopia	0.79	0.82

4.1.2. Corruption and Size of Delegation Team

Most of the climate vulnerable countries are among the highly corrupt countries in the world. Latest report on corruption perception showed that the Philippines and Ethiopia scored slightly more than 30 out of a 100 point scale, while the very clean country, i.e. Denmark, scored 91. All other vulnerable countries are in the top quarter of corrupt countries with a score less than 30 out of 100.Nonetheless, composition of national delegation for COPs does not show any statistical association with corruption. The last 10 years corruption rank for the countries has been tested with the number of participants in last 10 sessions of COPs, and no significant correlation has been found between these two.

Although apparently there is no statistical correlation between corruption and participation, while analysing individual participants from the selected countries, it has been found that some of the participants' affiliation, at least during the picks, are not mentioned in the official list of UNFCCC for countries, for example, Bangladesh and Nigeria. These may give a clue for assuming existence of political motivation, favoritism or nepotism in selection process of national delegation for COPs. For multiple sessions it has been the case with Bangladesh delegation team that a substantial number of political personalities, for instance, Member of the Parliament (MP), have been included in national delegation in addition to some names in the list without any affiliation.

4.1.3. Political Instability and Size of Delegation Team

The Political Instability Index has been prepared by the Economist in 2009/2010 season and attendees in COPs for the following years 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013 have been considered to find out if any correlation exists. It is to mention that, in the Political Instability Index '1' refers to high political instability and higher the value, lower the level of instability. Index for South Sudan was not available, hence excluded. Table 3 shows that there are very low positive correlation (close to no relation in most cases) between political instability and the number of participants for the selected vulnerable countries.

Table 3: Correlation between political stability and number of participants

Year	2010	2011	2012	2013
Correlation	0.056	0.0296	0.136	0.259

4.1.4. Environmental Performance and Number of Participants

Yale University has been producing Environmental Performance Index (EPI) every two years starting for 2006. The study assumes that level of environmental performance of a country may have influence on the number of delegations in environmental conferences. The number of participants in 2006, 2008, 2010 and 2012 has been compared with the EPI of respective years. In EPI, rank '1'means the strongest performance and higher the rank weaker the performance. Statistical test shows varied correlation in differ years ranging from moderate to low association. In 2006, 2008 and 2010 it was negatively related while in 2012, the number of participants in COP was slightly positively correlated to EPI.

Table 4: Correlation between EPI and number of participants

Year	2006	2008	2010	2012
Correlation	-0.56311	-0.53893	-0.08395	0.444563

4.2 Pattern of Participation

While G8 countries have been increasing delegation, in a general study it has been revealed that the number of participants from small developing countries to the COPs has been reducing constantly (Schroeder, et al., 2012). But the number of participants from Bangladesh in COPs during 1995-2013 shows an increasing trend with a sharp rise during COP 15 and COP 17 in 2009 and 2011, respectively.

4.2.1 Political Personalities in Delegation Team

Countries differ in priorities while selecting delegation teams; some countries send more from business association like Brazil, while some countries prefer to send more academics and researchers like Russia (Schroeder, et al., 2012). Bangladesh, during COP 14 – COP 18, has selected from 6-20% of the team from the Member of the Parliament (MP), irrespective of their involvement to any degree with different parliamentary committees and different ministries. The trend of selecting MPs started from Copenhagen session with 21 MPs in a team of 164 delegates under the leadership of the Prime Minister of the state to attend COP 15. The official list of participants of COP 15 does not show any affiliation (name only) of 19 participants, giving sufficient reason to assume that the selection for these individuals may have been made based on political consideration or nepotism.

4.2.2 COP – Opportunity for Tourism

Stochastic model showed that participation cost and location aspects, for example, tourist destination, have no relation to the number of attendance in COPs; and the venues for COPs that have colder climates attract more participants and increasing number of participants are enjoying more benefits of networking from COPs (Neeff, 2013). Although not significant, statistic shows that around 56% of the total participants from Bangladesh during last 19 sessions of COP have been attended in different sessions in Europe and North America while the rest 44% have been in venues in Asia, Africa and Latin America. From distance point, Asia as venue is less attractive to the participants from Bangladesh while more than 75% of the participants have attended sessions in other continents.

4.2.3 Non-State Actors in Delegation Team

Participation of non-government organizations (NGOs) from Bangladesh in the official delegation of COPs is not much and regular. Bangladesh has started to nominate executive from NGO since ninth session of COP. Till COP13, only four executives from two NGOs attended – one each in COP9 and 10 and two in COP13. During COP15, 15 NGO executives have joined the national delegation. In the more recent COPs, the size even went down. Varied participation from NGOs in Bangladesh has not been observed in the COP history. Five NGOs have been chosen more frequently for different sessions, sometimes multiple executives in the same year. Less than 70 individuals have attended in different sessions from less than 30 NGOs in

Bangladesh, whereas as of November 2013, there are more than 2,000 local NGOs in Bangladesh (NGOAB, 2013).

Involvement of development organizations to adaptation process is inevitable and it ranges from mere support to data collection for research purpose to hardcore action research. Regardless of the size of adaptation projects - large scale projects or climate resilient infrastructure - involvement of local development organization is a prerequisite. NGOs, along with local individuals and organizations, are the pro-active agents who immediately respond to the effect of climate change both in long- and short-term (Amaru and Chhetri, 2013). Hence, development organizations should get reasonable priority for greater learning and networking opportunity that COPs can provide on a broader scale. Since COP15, trend shows decreasing number but increasing proportion of NGO participants, which is an indication of positive concern about NGO involvement. In contrast, the surprising trend is that both the proportion of experts from academia and research institutes as well as government officials from different ministries have been declining while proportion of political leaders –MPs – has been increasing.

Side Events, platform where NNSAs including civil societies, NGOs, community-based organizations (CBOs) and intergovernmental organizations can meet to present and discuss key issues of climate change, are initiated and administered by UNFCCC Secretariat to support observer organizations to highlight the critical issues of climate change. Both side events and main programs of COP provide a platform for networking among practitioners and academics from around the world. For some people, attending COP is to raise their own profile only, rather than contributing through own knowledge and expertise (Schroeder and Lovell, 2012). Also for private and for-profit organizations, particularly for the low emitting technology producers and environmental consultants, attendance in COPs provides better networking opportunity. In this aspect also only two persons from one organization have been nominated for delegation team of Bangladesh for COP9, 11 and COP13 out of 19 sessions.

On a limited scale, as Side Events and the negotiations are closely linked, it is suggested that position of NGOs, along with industry association, over and with government may become more meaningful, if the NGOs maintain continuous dialogue to negotiate with government, not only in COPs (Schroeder and Lovell, 2012). NNSAs are quicker and more effective, at

least the way attendees of COPs perceive, than the nation-state units in dealing with climate change (Schroeder and Lovell, 2012).

4.2.4 Government officials in delegation team

Research showed that, for randomly selected countries, representatives from government units have increased continuously (Schroeder, et al., 2012), while for Bangladesh, during COP 13-19, the proportion of government officials among COP participants has been decreasing. The rationale behind the selected duration is that, till COP 12 Bangladesh has sent maximum 12 delegates in each session; from COP 13 in 2007 number of delegates started to intensify reaching to a maximum of 164 in Copenhagen 2009.

4.2.5 Comparison with Similar Demography

Nigeria sent the maximum number of delegates in any single session which was in COP15. Nigeria has sent larger delegation in most of the sessions than Bangladesh. Deviation in the size of delegation is high for Nigeria and Bangladesh. For Russia the deviation is low except for the session COP15 where only it sent triple digit delegation team; for the remaining session the range for Russian delegation team was 26-56. India, with more than eight times higher population than Bangladesh, has sent not more than 76 in any single session of COP. The maximum it sent in COP15. Surprisingly, during COP8 also which took place in New Delhi in 2002 Indian delegation team consisted of around 50 experts. Suriname and Tajikistan has been sending substantially smaller size of delegation team compared to that of Bangladesh, although these countries are almost equal to Bangladesh in terms of land area.

Political instability in Asian and African countries is more common. But the result shows it has no relation with the size of delegation team for COPs. Also, environmental performance of countries has no relation to the size of its delegation team to environmental mega conferences.

With respect to Bangladesh, the question may be raised that is this necessary to send a large delegation team for different sessions of COP. UNFCCC has acknowledged that most of the vulnerable countries are from the developing part of the world and hence, lack capacity to deal with climate change (UNFCCC, 2007). Large size of delegation may not be helping capacity building. Countries with comparable size and population are sending far smaller size of delegation team for COPs.

5. Conclusions

Schroeder et al. (2012) found that the small developing countries are downsizing the number of delegates for COPs, but this study shows that climate vulnerable countries, irrespective of geographic size and economic conditions, are increasing the number of delegates for various sessions of COP. This finding also refutes the argument Schroeder et al. (2012) made that poor countries are not able to afford large delegations. Out of 10 high-risk countries eight belong to low income category while Nigeria and Philippines belong to lower-middle income countries according to World Bank; and all of these countries are sending more and more delegates to attend COPs. As the median number of participants for last 19 sessions of COP does not show any statistical difference, it can be assumed that vulnerable countries are well in line with other vulnerable states.

Many sessions of COPs apparently failed to come to a consensus; failure to end-up in consensus in environmental conferences is not uncommon. In other words, many sessions of COP have been apparently accepted as 'collapse' (Hanks et al., 2001). World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in 2002 and many sessions of COP in different years are the example. With substantial preparation and spending of money and time WSSD was a wasted opportunity for progress (Seyfang, 2003). COP15 in which Copenhagen Accord was declared at the end of two-week long conference to hide the failure of such a mega conference, switching the priority to saving face of global leaders from the planned goal of saving the world, evidencing that COP 15 was keener towards destroying the expectations than delivering new hopes (Dimitrov, 2010).

The discussion raises few issues of concern. How far it is justified for LDCs like Bangladesh to constantly increase the number of delegates to COPs? UNFCCC has acknowledged that the most of the vulnerable countries are from the developing part of the world and hence, lack capacity to deal with climate change (UNFCCC, 2007). Does attending COP with inappropriate political leaders enhance capacity? It is argued that 'capacity gap' – resulted from lack of affordability and expertise – hinders poor countries' negotiation power and subsequently reduces effectiveness of their participation (Schroeder, et al., 2012). The trend in the volume of delegation team from Bangladesh does not show lack of affordability and, although the trend is declining, necessary level of experts has been maintained. These demonstrate that capacity gap does not exist. But the level of negotiation and effectiveness of participation by way of COP attendance need to be

tested. Favouritism and/or political consideration in selecting delegates for COPs are not reducing capacity gap but may reduce negotiation power and effectiveness.

Further research may focus on time and money spent for environmental mega conferences and the justification both from organizers and participants point of view. Also gender consideration in delegation team for environmental mega conferences from countries may be a useful research. For example, Suriname with its small size of delegation has better women participation than that of Bangladesh. During last 10 sessions of COPs women composed of about half of the team for Suriname while overall less than 20% of the delegation are female from Bangladesh.

Politically motivated selection of attendees between and among state and non-state actors by the government agencies play vital role and need special attention. For example, after the controversial national election of January 2014 in which the biggest opposition party has not participated, it would not be surprising if Bangladesh delegation team includes substantial number of MPs or people without specific affiliation of organization where they work. Organizers should come forward with policies to ensure effective communication to facilitate negotiation in international climate change dialogues.

Most of the climate vulnerable countries are ranked higher in corruption perception index that does not necessarily mean that national delegations teams are also formed illicitly; at least statistical analysis does not prove it. What is of concern is that individuals with relevant expertise, involvement and affiliation should be chosen to maximize the benefits of participation in mega conferences by way of negotiations and knowledge sharing which is unlikely with people without specific expertise.

The organizer, UNFCCC, should plan ahead on a reasonable balance among participants providing sufficient scope to discuss both in regular and in Side Events. In addition, UNFCCC may initiate guideline on composition of the participants to ensure a poised group of people from each nation containing experts from academia and research, NGOs, development practices, government, civil societies etc. Since the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development in 1992 several attempts have been made to unite the voices of the global leaders to ensure a sustainable earth, which is yet to achieve; smart policy and object-oriented actions involving state and non-state actors only help achieve this goals.

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