Education to boost climate resilience: Bangladesh Academy for Climate Services taking shape

On 21 March, 2018, fifty individuals from across 26 organizations came together to design an academy and learning umbrella for climate services in Bangladesh through a participatory and multi-stakeholder design workshop which took place at the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD) in Dhaka, Bangladesh. The workshop was a joint initiative of the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI), ICCCAD, CIMMYT and the CSRD in South Asia partnership. Supported by the United States Government and USAID.

Dr. Timothy J. Krupnik, International Maize and Wheat Improvement Centre's (CIMMYT) Systems Agronomist and Climate Services for Resilient Development (CSRD) in South Asia Project Leader, Ms. Melody Braun, Research Staff Associate of Columbia University and Dr. Saleemul Huq, Director of International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), founding members of the Bangladesh Academy for Climate Services (BACS) initiative, led the interactive workshop. Dr. Saleemul Huq said, "*We are hopeful to build such an institution that can help set up a long term capacity building movement for climate services in Bangladesh*".

The workshop encouraged the active networking of the participants from across sectors spanning health, agriculture, economic development and the financial sector, and disaster management. Participants discussed and identified constraints to long-term national capacity development in climate services, as well as ways to develop curricula and solutions to improve educational access to climate science and communication courses. The importance of developing both professional short course and advanced degree curricula was highlighted and discussed at length. This was the first of a series of events aimed at developing a self-sustaining cross-institutional academy for climate services in Bangladesh.

"*We are happy to partner with a broad range of organizations, committed individuals, educators, and universities to build a national platform to support education on climate services in Bangladesh*," commented Timothy J. Krupnik, "*While both my own and my organization's expertise lies in agriculture, we envision that the BACS will be cross-sectoral. It will therefore appeal to young students and professionals to apply and communicate climate science to the public to improve decision making, not only in agriculture, but in a diversity of sectors relevant to Bangladesh's national Development*".

Participants identifying constraints to long-term national capacity development in climate services, and also ways to develop curricula and solutions to improve educational access to climate science and communication courses.
Photo: Uttam Barma (CIMMYT)

Climate Services for Resilient Development (CSRD) is a global partnership whose core mission is to translate actionable climate information into easy to understand formats to spread awareness and use of climate services. The CSRD consortium in South Asia is led by the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) in partnership with the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD), Bangladesh Department of Agricultural Extension (DAE), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council (BARC), Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute (BARI), International Center for Integrated Mountain Development (ICIMOD), International Institute for Climate and Society (IRI), University de Passo Fundo (UPF), and the University of Rhode Island (URI).

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End of despair over disparity

The Bangladesh Academy for Climate Services helps bridge information gaps and provides a platform for stakeholders to communicate their findings and needs.

In Bangladesh and many other countries, there is a disconnect between climate science and its use. Hence, decision makers ranging from policy makers to farmers could benefit from increased access to relevant climate information. This creates the need for a platform to connect the users and producers of climate information. Therefore, to ensure that actionable climate service information is delivered to decision makers, the Bangladesh Academy for Climate Services (BACS) was launched on 5 August, 2018 in the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD). The academy was jointly founded by the International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) at Columbia University and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT).

BACS was created to open trans-sectorial and multi-stakeholder dialogue on climate services to identify existing initiatives, challenges and opportunities. The academy also aims to design tailored certification courses for students and early- to mid-level professionals to help address identified needs, and plans to create graduate-level curricula to train a new generation of weather, climate and sector experts with the skills needed to face the uncertainty of the coming decades.

Speaking at the event, Dr. Timothy J. Krupnik, senior scientist and systems agronomist at CIMMYT, said, "This academy is vital for bringing climate information to the public and is open for partners who are working in this area. Our job is to help the improvement of the use of climate services in Bangladesh."

The courses offered by BACS are intended for early- to mid-level professionals and students who are working in fields related to agriculture and food systems, disaster preparedness and response, and public health, among others, and who want to actively engage in developing climate services for their sectors in Bangladesh.

Dr. Saleemul Haque, Director of International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) explained why it was necessary to introduce an academy like BACS.
Photo: M. Shahidul Haque Khan

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Filling the gaps in climate forecasting

The first graduates of the BACS training program learned to make better decisions regarding climate services.

The first training course of the Bangladesh Academy for Climate Services (BACS) concluded on 25 October in the conference room of the Bangladesh Meteorological Department (BMD). BACS was jointly founded by the International Center for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD), the International Research Institute for Climate and Society (IRI) at Columbia University and the International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT), under the Climate Services for Resilient Development (CSRD) partnership in South Asia. The academy has taken the first steps to ensure important climate information and other services are delivered to the relevant parties by conducting a training program that began on 21 October 2018.

The BACS training program focused mainly on a deeper understanding of climate services and also on the challenges and expectations involved. Photo: Shahidul/CIMMYT

Participants from the private sector, educational institutes, government departments, and international NGOs attended the training program. The 5-day program included educational discussion sessions, informative presentations, question-and-answer sessions, and a field visit to Manikganj, a district adjacent to the capital of Bangladesh. The visit was organized to teach participants about the decision-making flowchart (DMF) in detail, which will help them make better decisions regarding climate services.

"It is crucial to decipher forecasts correctly to anticipate future disasters and for taking necessary precautions. Also, learning about the feasibility and limitations of climatology will help us design our forecasting needs," said participant Lamiya Mahpara Ahmed, an analyst at Start Fund Bangladesh. At end of the training program, participants identified climate-sensitive decisions within their respective fields and developed an understanding of existing decision-making processes. The program also aimed to provide participants with a basic understanding of climate data, climate services, and available products, as well as teach them about strategies that will enhance their use of climate services.

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"As someone with limited technical knowledge, issues like weather forecasting, using climate data, and acknowledging limitations and challenges have become easier for me to understand and work with, thanks to this course," said Hossain Ishrath Adib, Head of Programme Implementation in Practical Action

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