

# Just Transition for Bangladesh

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## Foreword

Just Transition for Bangladesh: A Policy Brief is an important initiative that aims to give an overview of just transition related initiatives in Bangladesh and their incorporation in policies and plans. Till now, the level of understanding to the Government of Bangladesh (GoB) policy makers on just transition issues is only limited. Initiatives such as the preparation of this policy brief will contribute to enhancing knowledge and learning on the issue.

Currently the Government of Bangladesh is in a process of updating its Nationally Determined Contribution (NDC) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP), as agreed under the Paris Agreement. In consultation process to prepare these important policy documents, the level of engagement by trade unions is not up to the mark and in draft versions of the NDC and NAP, issue of just transition is not addressed. We recognize that the Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan 2021 has addressed Just transition with importance and emphasized skills development for internally displaced persons due to climate change, which is a first step.

According to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), 4.1 million people (2.5% of the population) were displaced in Bangladesh because of climate-induced disasters as of 2019. Most of these displaced people are workers in the informal sector. Securing their livelihoods is a big challenge for these displaced persons. In order to survive, some of them are obliged to engage in the worst forms of labour and on the other hand they have very limited access to employment in the formal sector due to the lack of required skills. The displacement of more is expected to continue in the future. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Relief has prepared a strategy for displaced persons but there is no visible attempt for the implementation of this strategy. Covid 19 also increased the vulnerability of these displaced persons hampering their daily income due to earlier lock downs and restrictions in public movement.

In order to implement Just Transition policies, the Ministry of Environment should acknowledge trade unions representing the workers and labour rights support organisations as important stakeholders in the national fight against adverse effects of climate change in Bangladesh.

There is a clear need for effective partnership and collaboration between government and trade unions to address different environmental issues at workplaces and combat against the negative impacts of climate change on industries and workers in Bangladesh that includes workers in the informal economy. The ILO Guidelines for a "Just Transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies for all" provides a good tool for all actors involved to address this issue.

The policy brief suggests actions for the Government of Bangladesh and trade unions that will bring about positive changes in policy formulation and ways of addressing the just transition issues in a better way. Working together is crucial to implement sustainable policies. It is expected that, climate actions such as the introduction of green energy, green transport must address the challenges of just transition issues, particularly by securing the livelihoods and rights of the vulnerable working people and small-holder farmers.

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The time for a Just Transition and to Climate Proof our Work is now! The future depends on what we do together today.



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## Abbreviation

<b>BFTUC</b>	Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress	<b>JT</b>	Just Transition
<b>BJSD</b>	Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal	<b>JSJ</b>	Jatio Sramik Jote
<b>BLF</b>	Bangladesh Labour Federation	<b>MoEFCC</b>	Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change
<b>BMSF</b>	Bangladesh Mukto Sramik Federation	<b>MoEL</b>	Ministry of Labour & Employment
<b>BOSHE</b>	Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment	<b>NAP</b>	National Adaptation Plan
<b>BTUK</b>	Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra	<b>NDC</b>	Nationally Determined Contribution
<b>BAU</b>	Business-As-Usual	<b>NTCP</b>	National Tripartite Consultation Platform
<b>COP</b>	Conference Of Parties	<b>PKSF</b>	Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation
<b>GoB</b>	Government of Bangladesh	<b>RAC</b>	Research and Advocacy Cell
<b>GHG</b>	Greenhouse gas	<b>RMG</b>	Ready-made Garments
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product	<b>SMEs</b>	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
<b>IPCC</b>	Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change	<b>SDGs</b>	Sustainable Development Goals

## Executive Summary

In recent years, the just transition to a low carbon economy, supporting climate resilient development has become an issue of global concern for all the right reasons. The response measures to address climate change through switching to a cleaner energy mix and enhancing the adaptive capacity of society – businesses, workplaces and communities will entail significant disruptions particularly, to the lives and livelihoods of the working poor and the marginalised communities across the world. For the most vulnerable countries like Bangladesh, achieving a just transition is important. In countries like Bangladesh, which are not big users of fossil fuels, just transition as a response to climate change impacts relates more to strengthening the resilience and adaptive capacity of communities and rehabilitating the displaced people, ensuring their livelihoods and income opportunities. With this perspective, this policy brief reviews how workers and other vulnerable people are coping with the twin crises of climate change and COVID-19, and looks at the roles the Government of Bangladesh and the trade unions can play to strengthen the just transition measures.

Our review shows that the twin crisis had and continues to have a very negative impact on working people in Bangladesh. The rural and urban working poor in particular are being impacted more and in different ways. The government's adaptation actions to date, are inadequate. The little stimulus package targeted at the working people and disaster-hit urban and rural poor was implemented in a way where benefits only reached the workers of organised trade unions, which cover about 5% of the labour force. Millions of workers, particularly in informal sectors including a significant share of women workers in farming and other small and micro-businesses remain outside of any social protection schemes provided by the Government. The Government policies and plans did not include any issues related to just transition. On the other hand, the employers of organised labor such as the garment sector, which has predominantly young women labourers, have no access to such employee benefit schemes. Trade unions face many restrictions both from the Government and the employers in order to establish and register free trade unions. Political partisanship in Bangladesh has long been a factor that impacts the operations of independent unions. In addition to managing a resilient recovery from the impacts of the pandemic, it will be crucial to attend to the realities of Bangladeshi workers to support a just transition that makes jobs and economic sectors resilient to climate change, alongside creating a pathway towards a low carbon development strategy.

This brief provides recommendations for the Government, employers and trade unions in the short, medium and long terms. These include a massive scaling up of capacity building and the establishment of a tripartite consultation forum among the government, employers and labour leaders.

## Introduction

Since being recognised in the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement, the agenda of a just transition (JT) to a low carbon economy, from the carbon-intensive fossil fuel-based development, has become increasingly important, in part because of the impacts and regularity of extreme climate disasters becoming the new normal. The Working Group-1 report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) provides dire warnings about the impending climate crisis and highlights the vulnerability, particularly of the low-income countries and poor communities in countries across the world. These people are being impacted most with not much cushion to adapt. Then, for the last two years the COVID-19 pandemic has further wreaked havoc on lives of the working people, both in formal and informal employment.

Under this scenario, the concern given to JT is being expanded. From its base on environmental considerations, it is also shaped by other structural changes affecting labour markets, such as globalisation, the deployment of labour-saving technologies and the shift to service-based economy. The global need for a climate resilient low-carbon economy brought the issue of JT upfront - from high-emitting industries to cleaner energy and other greener sectors, the creation of green jobs and training/retraining of workers in all industries and sectors. These were in response to switch to a clear energy system. Simultaneously, JT must also tackle the impacts of climate change. Many governments around the world are showing some eagerness to embrace certain attributes of JT, for example, through acknowledging some social impacts of climate change on the poor and vulnerable. However, social dialogue mechanisms are not well developed and governments have tended to avoid engagements and collaboration with unions. The COVID-19 pandemic with its devastating disruptions for the last two years put JT into sharper relief. With its increasing endorsements globally, the issue of JT is gaining added traction in international and national policy agendas, connecting climate policy with broader social, economic and development policy objectives.

Bangladesh, a coastal low-income country, is one of the most vulnerable in the world, as recognised by all kinds of assessments worldwide. On average, a few million people are displaced by extreme climate events. The

number of lives lost from such events has reduced because of the introduction of relatively robust early warning and rapid community mobilisation schemes. But the livelihoods of workers and farmers continue to be in great distress. As Bangladesh is not a big user of coal or oil, except for using natural gas in generating electricity, the concept of JT here differs from its original mission. In Bangladesh, JT relates more to strengthening resilience and adaptive capacity of climate impacted communities and displaced people for enhancing their livelihoods and income opportunities. The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has initiated a plethora of climate change and adaptation policies, together with an ambitious stimulus package to support workers and others suffering from the impacts from Covid-19. Still, there was not much evaluation of how the working class is adjusting to these twin crises. In this context, several questions can be raised: What is the current status of the most vulnerable people under this twin crisis? Which sectors are the most affected? What kind of policies/measures are taken by the GoB to address the JT issues? What role do the trade unions play in the JT process? This policy brief is an attempt to explain these issues.

## Global endorsements of Just Transition approach

The Paris Agreement recognises the need for “taking into account the imperatives of a just transition of the workforce and the creation of decent work and quality jobs in accordance with nationally defined development priorities” (Preamble). At the Conference of Parties (COP) 24, more than 50 governments adopted the ‘Solidarity and Just Transition Silesia Declaration’ that signified progress on acknowledging the risks to labour markets in carbon-intensive sectors which are required to transition towards low-carbon development (UNFCCC, 2018). The Silesia Declaration also underscores the need to support developing nations in carrying out activities that will result in the creation of quality jobs in non-urban areas.

The ILO’s ‘Guidelines for a just transition’ states how the transition will create opportunities for quality jobs and incomes from greener products and services in sectors like agriculture, construction, recycling and tourism (ILO, 2015). The Guideline of JT also emphasizes the need for raising investment for sustainable production and consumption of natural resources leading to creation of more decent jobs. JT can facilitate social inclusion by giving access to affordable energy and other environmental services, especially for women and marginalised communities in remote areas. After the

United Nations Climate Action Summit 2019, the UN Secretary General António Guterres announced the programme of 'Climate Action for Jobs' which contains four impact areas, including job-centered policies for climate action; inclusive social protection policies; social dialogue; and research and development for ensuring just transition (ILO, 2019). The Initiative now has 48 partner countries which have formally made commitments to formulate national plans for a JT. It engages with partners such as national or subnational governments, workers' and employers' organizations, academia and think tanks, multilateral and regional institutions, businesses, and civil society organizations working to a just transition for all in the context of tackling climate change (ILO, 2022). Bangladesh could benefit from taking on this framework.

Now, JT is focusing on the victims of both climate change and Covid-19 pandemic, who have lost their jobs or are underemployed. The more inclusive agenda of JT is focused on wider social issues, with an approach of social dialogue and consultation with the most vulnerable segments of the people from this double crisis. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) also align with JT attributes in respecting human rights, promoting accountability, inclusiveness, gender equality, decent work and resilience, and climate change (ADB, 2021). The COP26 also highlighted the necessity of governments to translate labour policies targeted towards JT for creation of decent jobs in other sectors and facilitate economic diversification in carbon-intensive regions (UKCOP26, 2021).

### **Climate Change and Just Transition in Bangladesh**

The JT concerns in Bangladesh relate more to climate change impacts and their effect on the workers including women, children and the disabled persons. Millions of people, mostly poor, are displaced at least temporarily when a disaster happens. These people are sheltered in cyclone and flood protection centres and after the disaster is over, they usually go back to their dilapidated existence. Sometimes, they can access government assistance for rehabilitation, but it is very inadequate. Climatic stress causes rural-urban migration and exacerbates poverty. Oftentimes, displaced people move to slums of big cities in search of work, often crowding the already crowded slums. The living conditions deteriorate in their villages due to losses in service facilities of health, safety, education, and food security.

Climate change has the most impacts on those working in fisheries, agriculture and construction sectors (Bhuiyan, 2017). For example, in Jessore district, southwest of Bangladesh, most of the workers employed in shrimp processing are climate migrants from surrounding areas who often lack the opportunity to gain any other skills (Rashid, 2020). More than 10 million fulltime and part time laborers are dependent on fisheries (Bhuiyan, 2017). It is evident that people in the agriculture sector become most vulnerable due to the impacts of climate change (such as intensified rainfall, sea level rise, infertile soil, salinization, etc.), which lead to crop failure and causes rural-urban migration (Hayward & Ayeb-Karlsson, 2021). Though agriculture contributes only about 12% of Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP), it still employs about 40% of our labour force. Smallholder farmers inevitably transfer to ecologically damaging shrimp farming that ruins the traditional local economies. Hence, JT can be instrumental in reinforcing job diversification opportunities for local people; and halt climate-induced male out-migration, reduce the burden of marginalised women who borrow money at high interest rate from microfinance institutions, being stuck in the vicious cycle of poverty (Hayward & Ayeb-Karlsson, 2021). Hence, addressing the formalisation of informal work as a part of JT, strategies are essential in countries like Bangladesh.

Agriculture is the main source of food security, but it is also a prime source of the world's greenhouse gas (GHG) emissions. However, actions to curtail GHGs in agriculture could risk millions of peoples' lives and food security, if not done taking into consideration JT measures. Women face patriarchal barriers to access adequate farming tools, finance and techniques. So, a just transition can be a key tool to curtail these rigid gender roles, and shift to food systems that are suitable for communities, biodiversity, nature and protect all farmers. A co-production of knowledge with indigenous peoples (who utilise their traditional knowledge and cultural practices) might allow them to save ecosystems by securing their tenure rights of indigenous peoples (Kwizera & Anderson, 2020). Moreover, JT can facilitate an economic diversification scheme to avoid free market adaptation that might distort climate measures in countries like Bangladesh. For instance, it is a common phenomenon to swap rice production by mango in semi-arid parts of Bangladesh (ITUC, 2010). This increases the risk of social unrest and undermines the livelihoods of

almost one third of households who rely on their work as daily laborers in agriculture. Hence, the mechanisms of just transition and locally-led and community-based adaptation actions can aid in implementing policies that resonate with local communities' needs/choices on food/agriculture.

One of the major challenges stated by Bangladesh Free Trade Union Congress (BFTUC) due to climate change is

### COVID-19 and Just Transition

Impacts of Covid-19, a new disaster in human life, had sudden impacts on the elements of JT, particularly in terms of loss of jobs, food and health insecurity particularly, in urban areas. The most impacted sectors in Bangladesh are RMG, construction, hotels/restaurants and tourism. However, the workers of the informal sectors and day-laborers were impacted the highest. Almost 24, 000 jobs in the RMG sector have been terminated which led to a decrease in consumer demand (USAID, 2020). About 83% of the export revenue of Bangladesh relied on the garment industry (BGMEA, 2020). The Bangladesh Institute of Labour Studies stated that manufacturing, construction, transport, wholesale and retail trade, food and accommodation services and personal service sectors were hurt most by the pandemic (Moazzem & Taznur, 2021). Around 24 million people working in different sectors across Bangladesh were speculated to lose their jobs during the beginning of the pandemic (Rahman, et. al., 2021). The increased rates of absenteeism might have led to permanent job losses and exacerbated poverty, food insecurity, and future earning opportunities. Among male workers in Dhaka and Chittagong, job losses were more likely for transport and construction workers. For women, job losses are seen more for house maids or cleaners (Genoni, et. al., 2020). Women employed in agriculture incurred higher income loss (14%) than for men employed there (12%) (UNICEF Bangladesh, 2020). This loss of income inevitably created stress and anxiety which worsened health impacts related with the pandemic, mainly in the mental health arena (Genoni, et. al., 2020).

In Bangladesh, the ready-made garment sector provides formal employment to low-skilled and entry level jobs for young women and men, and employed 4.2 million people before COVID-19, more than 95% of them being young girls and women. However, trade union coverage in this sector accounts for 5-10% of total labor force. Some notable trade unions of the garment sector are affiliates of

that the workers who migrate from the countryside face new hurdles in the cities (Hosen, 2020). They reside in poor quality housing, and work in unsafe conditions with high pollution levels, receiving minimal wages inadequate for survival. As summer is getting hotter in Bangladesh, workers in sectors of ready-made garment (RMG), manufacturing, construction and transport suffer due to heat stress without a smooth transition to climate-friendly jobs.

IndustriAll, while several retail sector trade unions are affiliates of UNI Global Union (Just Transition Center, 2020). During COVID-19 lockdowns, many foreign fashion companies have canceled/withdrawn orders causing redundancy of workers without furlough pay. Even so, the GoB provided a \$588 million stimulus package for the sector to pay for wages. However, when the sum is divided by the number of workers, it only provides wages for one month (Just Transition Center, 2020). The unfavorable working conditions of the workers signifies the urgency of just transition to provide employees with proper access to decent housing (with space for quarantine and social distancing), safely managed water, sanitation and hygiene facilities on and off the job, free health care, safe transport, safe work practices and income protection. The trade unions of the textile sector mostly lack adequate knowledge on the importance of the well-being of workers or the capacity to advocate for improvements as they have only primary or secondary education. This narrow knowledge level and systems to raise workplace concerns effectively hinders the chances to comprehend government regulations such as health and safety. Additionally, the Multinational Companies are hesitant to have a trade union presence within their Bangladeshi factories (Khan et. al., 2020).

In Bangladesh, 90% of women employed are in the informal sector who are also the primary caregivers. In addition to this, rigid gender norms, unpaid care work, patriarchal norms, limited economic opportunities add on the causes of being low-paid and vulnerable (Tabassum, 2021). JT can be an opportunity to strengthen trade unions to establish the pillars of sustainable society, green economy, decent work, negotiate for workers' rights, and green jobs for ameliorating livelihoods (Bhuiyan, 2017). Women, young people and marginalised community members normally do not belong to formal unions where their voices represent them in negotiations to facilitate transitions. Whereas, in the formal sector it is mainly the RMG sector employing abundant cheap female labour in

the country. The COVID-19 hampered this sector the most which highlighted the urgency of having more diverse employment opportunities for women to avoid over-dependency on a one industry (Tabassum, 2021). Besides the RMG sector, construction and tourism sectors were the most impacted, because life and activities got halted for a number of months during the lockdowns. Though things are changing gradually, they are far from the level before the pandemic.

To tackle the pandemic fallout, the government has adopted several stimulus packages for the marginalized working-class population. Table 1 shows several COVID-19 funds disbursed by the government in liquidity and fiscal stimulus support. Even though the GoB dedicated funds

targeted towards uplifting the livelihoods of workers/laborer/ farmers who struggled the most, the fiscal stimulus for Bangladesh could have consisted of several specific long-term objectives. Khatun (2020) suggested that for making marginalized people more resilient to shocks like COVID-19, universal social protection and universal healthcare should be initiated.

One of the fiscal and monetary support was the creation of the Export Development Fund of Bangladesh Bank which was dedicated for pre-shipment credit refinance scheme, refinancing scheme for the agriculture sector, low-income farmers and small traders, loans for job creation, and credit guarantee scheme for Small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) (Khatun, 2020).

Table 1: Government's COVID-19 fund support dedicated for laborer, workers and vulnerable sector

Type of Stimulus/Fiscal Support in crore taka	Stimulus Explanation	As Share of GDP of FY2020 in national budget (in %)	Source
Liquidity support of BDT3,200 crores in 2021	TK450 crore will be given to day-labourers, transport workers, small business people, shipping workers	N/A	(UNB, 2021)
	TK1500 crores as loan by Palli Karma-Sahayak Foundation (PKSF) (to finance employment generation activities in rural areas)		
	TK1,000 crores - Working capital loan to pay salary and allowance of people working in tourism industry		
Liquidity support of 5,000	For salary support to export oriented manufacturing industry workers	0.178	(Khatun et. al., 2021)
Liquidity support of 12,750	Agriculture Refinancing Scheme (till 31st Oct 2020)	0.454	
Liquidity support of 3,000	Refinancing scheme for low-income farmers and small traders (till 31st Oct 2020)	0.107	
Liquidity support of 3,200	Job creation through loans	0.114	
Fiscal stimulus of 2,500	Distribution of free food items to 2,34,00,000 households	0.089	
Fiscal stimulus of 1,258	Distribution of cash among the targeted population	0.045	

There is still ample opportunity for fiscal stimulus to be utilized for providing green infrastructure to make economic recovery sustainable (Khatun, 2020). Together, existing social protection schemes, which cover only a fraction of what is needed, should be scaled. Therefore, providing decent social protection should be central to all Adaptation and Loss and Damage policies. It is a crucial aspect of the ILO's Joint Guidelines.

### Government policies and actions related to just transition

In the area of climate change management, the GoB has initiated a number of policies including the submission of the updated NDC (Nationally Determined Contribution) just before COP26. The updated NDC has a plan to reduce its emissions by 7.73% below the business-as-usual (BAU) level by 2030, using its domestic resources, and with international support, another 15.1% are planned to be reduced (NDC, 2021). It now covers five sectors: industry, power, transport, agriculture and waste management. The NDC also has a section on adaptation, which includes disaster management, agriculture and food security, water management, both surface and rainwater, etc.

The National Adaptation Plan (NAP) is now being finalized. The NAP preparation process involved stakeholder consultations in Dhaka and in some other regions, but those consultations did not include the trade unions. Table 2 analyses the main GoB policies related to development and climate change, and the consideration of JT management. Interestingly, the national policies, such as the 8th Five Year Plan (2021-2025), Inception Report on Formulation and Advancement of NAP, Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan (2021-2030), and updated NDC 2021 does not have a single expression that includes 'just transition' in their texts (Table-2). These documents contain excerpts on climate change and social inclusion, but they did not mention JT at all. This shows that the Government or the writers of these policy documents are not aware of this emerging concept of ensuring fairness and equity to structural changes in the economy. ICCCAD's discussions with trade union leaders reveal that they invite environment ministry officials in their events related to climate change, but the ministry never invites them. This is a huge gap.

Table 2: National Policies and Plans' alignment with Just Transition

National Policies and Plans	Frequency of using 'just transition'	Relevant excerpts
8th Five Year Plan (2021-2025)	0	Social protection prioritized to address COVID-19 effects on the marginalized
NDC Inception Report (Updated summary version submitted)	0	Social inclusion & equity (weighted redistribution of carbon tax revenue (planned) based on income levels, and fiscal incentives to provide affordable clean energy for low-income populations
Inception Report on Formulation and Advancement of NAP	0	NAP can play a critical role in protecting the most vulnerable to climate change
Mujib Climate Prosperity Plan	0	Highlights the importance of livelihood options through social protection programs and social safety nets (e.g., cash transfers, cash-for-work) to minimize economic shock from climatic hazards

## Trade Union perspective of just transition in Bangladesh

Trade unions of Bangladesh are familiar with the concept of JT since 1997, and since then many events have been organized by them on climate change. The latest being on 20 December 2021, where Prof. Mizan Khan has been a panelist. The nodal ministry for the trade unions is Labor and Employment (MoLE), but the focal point of climate change is the Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change (MoEFCC). So, there is a problem of coordination between these two ministries, for which the trade unions could not reach yet the MoEFCC.

Trade union leaders have the vision of improving their roles in safeguarding workers' dignity and rights, health and safety, and facilitate the transition to a low-carbon economy. However, in 2020, ITUC (2021) ranked Bangladesh among the top ten worst countries for workers. In Bangladesh, the laws and lengthy registration process undermine workers' interests to form or join trade unions. The constant threats from employers, violence against peaceful protests and the indifference of authorities in the registration process impact workers' job security. Within 2010 and 2021, almost 1,100 union registration applications were submitted to the authorities and the Department of Labour discarded 46% of them; in the garment sector it is a common scenario for workers to face harassment by the police, who use batons, gunshots, tear gas etc. to silence their voices (ITUC, 2021). Most of the informal sector's workers fail to be unionized, as only 4.2% of total labor force are active trade union members (Moazzem & Taznur, 2021). For example, rural agricultural workers are largely outside of trade unionism due to their inability to join formal unions, or to understand its benefits. Currently, there are an estimated 8551 trade unions, but most of them are operating at a very basic level. In trade union-related work, workers are involved only 35.2% in transportation, 11.6% in RMG, 6.9% in construction and 4.6% in jute sector respectively (Moazzem & Taznur, 2021).

Trade unions' work is limited by the lack of social dialogue between the government and trade unions on climate change; and there is a weak collaboration between trade unions, the broader environmental movement, and financial limitations (Hosen, 2020). During the pandemic, the trade unions have urged the government for a fair national economic and social recovery plan. This calls for improved industrial relations at national and sectoral level

through establishing a National Tripartite Consultation platform and a national agreement between government, employers, and trade unions for an effective social dialogue on climate change (Just Transition Centre, 2020). It is crucial for trade unions to participate in the design, policy and monitoring of climate change adaptation and mitigation issues for the uptake of just transition (ITUC, 2010). The government must play a more active role in consulting and motivating institutionalized formal engagement of trade unions with employers, communities, and marginalized groups. The demand side for this is also weak because of many factors inside the trade unions, such as fragmentation and trade unions, or an active part of it in Bangladesh are aligned with the political parties. Though the BFTUC is non-aligned, many of its members belong to politically aligned front organizations.

During 2016, in Bangladesh, TUC Aid funded a project which was implemented by the Bangladesh Occupational Safety, Health and Environment (BOSHE) Foundation to raise awareness of 'just transition' of trade unions. The project distributed flyers on JT, conducted National Trainer Training on JT and green jobs for union leaders in vulnerable sectors. The training invited BFTUC, Jatio Sramik League (JSL), Bangladesh Mukto Sramik Federation (BMSF), Bangladesh Jatiyatabadi Sramik Dal (BJSJ), Bangladesh Labour Federation (BLF), Bangladesh Trade Union Kendra (BTUK) and Jatio Sramik Jote (JSJ) as participants (TUC, 2016).

Recently, trade unions in Bangladesh are becoming more involved in understanding the impacts of climate change through seminars, workshops and other several events hosted by the National Union Centre. BFTUC is simultaneously educating its members about 'just transition', mainly content relating to occupational health and safety (OSH). They are also motivating workers to take part in dialogue with their employers and policymakers (Hosen, 2020). The trade unions of Bangladesh can provide adequate training on low-carbon processes and technologies, and accommodate educational breaks of students to train new skills (ITUC, 2010). On 20th of December 2021, a multi-stakeholder consultation was held in Dhaka on the impact of climate change on the labour force in Bangladesh. The consultation was attended by government officials, practitioners, academicians, trade union leaders, NGO and INGOs. The event highlighted, among others, the need for raising awareness among workers on climate change issues, totally



inadequate support for Covid-19 victims, lack of reflection of JT in national policies, and missing social dialogue with trade union platforms on JT.



The meeting on Just Transition held on 20 December 2021 in Dhaka, where the lead author of this article attended as a speaker.

### Just Transition activities in other countries:

Many countries are becoming aware about the multifaceted benefits of JT, as it is embedded in the basic necessities of life: education, healthcare, access to clean

water and sanitation. The table below highlights the current state of some countries in learning about JT activities. The UNFCCC’s NDC Synthesis (2021) report during COP26 shows how some Parties valued the urgency of JT for their workforces; presented their social and economic measures related to JT; and asked for accessible training for green jobs. Economic diversification plans for aligning with JT was also stressed by some Parties in the NDC report for designing climate policies that leads to an equitable transition, and avoids risks arising from relevant sectors due to the implementation of climate policies. The Government and the trade unions in Bangladesh can learn these lessons.

Table 3: Just Transition Measures in selected countries

Country	Just Transition Measure
India and Chile	Social protection & security measures are being enhanced for ‘just transition. In India impromptu social protection infrastructures such as mobile pre-school services are being provided for rural workers. In Chile, child-care centers are established for seasonal agriculture workers (UNFCCC, 2020)
Zimbabwe	Conducting a holistic review of its NDCs guided by a JT dialogue and green job assessment by incorporating them to climate policies for enhancing social inclusion, and inclusive job creation (UNDP Zimbabwe, 2021)
Pakistan	Government is at the initial stage of brainstorming for aligning the energy sector with JT (such as introducing health policies, skill development, mechanism for social dialogue, etc.) (Aslam, et. al. 2021)
Philippines	Trade unions like Power Union, Sentro, the National Confederation of Transport Workers’ Union are playing an active role in ‘just transition’ to aid the workers with collective bargaining agreements; tenure security; upskilling in the manufacturing, agriculture, and services sectors. However, lack of process for social dialogues with workers is a barrier (Torres, 2021)
Serbia	The trade unions have started to integrate the idea of ‘just transition’ for the energy sector. However, accessing adequate finance is still a challenge. Trade unions such as CATUS are engaging more with workers to influence political decisions (Seiller, 2021).

### Conclusion and Recommendation:

The above discussion shows that the twin crises of climate change and Covid-19 already had and continues to have a very negative impact on the working class in Bangladesh. As Bangladesh is not a big fossil fuel producer and user, the JT concerns more from the impact side of climate change, and not from the response measures for reducing emissions toward a low-carbon economy. The rural and urban working poor in particular, are being impacted

socially and economically. The government’s adaptation actions are totally inadequate. The minor share of the stimulus package was executed in a way that benefited to some extent, only the workers of organized trade unions. Once the pandemic becomes manageable, it will be crucial to attend to the realities of Bangladeshi workers for a JT. This will make jobs and economic sectors resilient to climate change, alongside creating a pathway towards low-carbon development strategy. Some challenges exist for just transitions, such as, economic reforms might lead

to job losses of workers; decreasing the incomes of poor households from increased energy and commodity prices; the necessity for workplaces and communities to adapt to climate change to curtail loss of assets, livelihoods, and migration (ILO, 2015). Hence, to overcome the challenges the national policies are extremely important, but they are not yet responsive to the JT concerns. In this regard, Bangladesh can learn from those developing countries which have already internalized the JT issues in their policies and actions. Global initiatives, such as the Climate Action for Jobs can provide vital support in this regard, particularly in raising awareness and advocacy. Also, it can greatly contribute to capacity building of all stakeholders,

such as the government officials, trade unions, and its members. Capacity building at scale is needed on just transition for the Ministry of Labor and Employment, Ministry of Industries, MoEFCC, trade unions, employers, and workers to facilitate the transition. Together, the trade unions need to be more active in expanding their membership base and work independently of any vested political interests. Finally, following the tripartite approach of the ILO guidelines, JT policies after all are the responsibility of governments, employers and unions, where the civil society leaders can play the role of a bridge builder.

### Recommendations for just transition in Bangladesh:

The table-4 below provides recommendations to gradually realize just transition in Bangladesh with a focus on the actions and initiatives to be taken by the trade unions. For the successful implementation, all measures need at least tripartite engagement from the government and business sector. Additionally, engagement from broader civil society is also crucial. The immediate/short term, medium term and long-term actions are aligned with responsible parties and with contextual explanation for addressing the imperatives of a just transition. This will potentially create grounds for a fair and equitable transition towards a climate-resilient low carbon economy in Bangladesh.

Immediate Actions	Responsible Parties	Remarks (if any)
<b>Engage with the Bangladeshi government in order to comply with international labour laws (ratified ILO conventions),</b>	BFTUC and other civil society organisations	
<b>Organize series of events and workshops with the two key ministries - MoEL &amp; MoEFCCC</b>	BFTUC to lead, but having the two ministries on board & the major employers' associations	As the ministries are not aware of the JT agenda, these workshops are extremely important for their sensitization
<b>Mapping of stakeholders in JT, based on considering their potential impact-this includes ministries, employers, trade unions, etc.</b>	BFTUC	BFTUC to establish a dedicated small research & advocacy cell (RAC) - on an immediate basis.
<b>Prepare a strategy of stakeholder based actions based on the roadmap</b>	BFTUC	BFTUC RAC to do based on stakeholder consultations
<b>Draw a plan of bi-monthly meetings with MoEL &amp; MoEFCC</b>	BFTUC, relevant labor and environment officials	Having the GoB on board for JT is a challenge, but constant lobbying will be required
<b>Review of gaps for JT in existing policies &amp; plans</b>	GoB led by MoEFCC	As the focal point of the UNFCCC process, the Ministry has to comply with the COP26 decisions that includes the adoption of the Silesia Declaration
<b>Organize series of discussions/ roundtable among the TU leaders, concerned ministries and employer associations and</b>	BFTUC in collaboration with the MoLE & MoEFCC & employer federations	BFTUC RAC in partnership with the relevant CSO leaders to lobby with the GoB & employer federations, as

related CSOs to establish a National Tripartite Consultation Platform (NTCP)		they may not be positively disposed to the idea, at least initially
Draw an agreed structure, mandate and operational modalities of the NTCP	BFTUC & legal wings of the MoEL * employer federations	The process for such a NTCP may take time depending on how the BFTUC can lobby with the GoB
Prepare a capacity building strategy of TU leaders & members on JT	BFTUC	BFTUC and RAC with a hired consultant
Prepare a fund mobilization strategy, both from internal & external sources, for implementing actions on short, medium & long terms including continuous training for capacity building	BFTUC	BFTUC and RAC with a hired consultant
Brainstorming on how to bring on board the workers including women workers of informal sectors	BFTUC in partnership with associations of informal sectors' workers	This is an important need & task as vast majority of workers in Bangladesh remain outside of formal trade unionism

Mid-term	Responsible Parties	Remarks (if any)
<b>Set up a national tripartite Just Transition commission to study and promote JT policies and measures in Bangladesh. Support the work of this national plan with sectorial tripartite discussions based on effective social dialogue in sectors and companies. These plans will be based on a detailed analysis of the climate crisis on and according policies on the labour market and on communities.</b>	BFTUC, MoEL, MoEFCC & employer federations	Tripartite JT policies should include: (1) vocational skill program for the low carbon transition, (2) social protection programs and measures tailored to deal with the impact of climate change and low carbon transition policies.  Develop proposals to allocate climate finance for mitigation (energy transition, forest and nature protection, skills development, etc.) and adaptation (social protection measures, skills development, etc.) for just transition policies and measures.
<b>Incorporate the results of tripartite just transition plans (see above) in the NDC of Bangladesh and all other relevant adaptation and mitigation plans.</b>	GoB	
<b>Prepare training modules &amp; begin training of TU leaders &amp; members in phases</b>	BFTUC & its branches	This will require commissioning of relevant experts/advocates by BFTUC RAC
<b>Organize social dialogue with ministries and employment federations relevant on JT principles</b>	FTU, in association with MoEL, MoEFCC & CSOs	BFTUC RAC to prepare relevant flyers for the purpose

<b>Prepare appropriate texts for inclusion of JT elements in government plans &amp; strategies</b>	BFTUC, MoEL, MoEFCC & employer federations	BFTUC RAC to lead drafting the texts
<b>Lobbying consistently with the ministries, employer associations &amp; donor agencies</b>	BFTUC	BFTUC RAC
<b>Initiating research on potential of green jobs in Bangladesh &amp; make plans accordingly</b>	GoB ministries led by MoEL	This is extremely important for absorbing the rising number of youth labor force for a JT process
<b>Lobbying &amp; watchdogging for enhanced and effective implementation of social protection schemes of the Government</b>	BFTUC	BFTUC RAC to have the Ministry of Social Welfare on board
<b>Prepare &amp; disseminate regular advocacy materials based on JT related global documents from the ILO, UNFCCC &amp; other agreed documents</b>	BFTUC	BFTUC
<b>Long-term</b>	<b>Responsible Parties</b>	<b>Remarks (if any)</b>
<b>Mobilizing sustainable &amp; adequate financing should be a priority, &amp; work consistently with banks, financial institutions &amp; donor agencies</b>	BFTUC	BFTUC RAC to build national & int'l networks & partnerships for mobilization of financial & technical assistances
<b>Work with academicians &amp; civil society leaders on JT issues &amp; principles</b>	BFTUC	BFTUC RAC, aligning with CSOs & Think Tanks
<b>Continue lobbying with the ministries &amp; agencies for inclusion of JT principles &amp; elements in the long term climate resilient &amp; low-carbon development strategy of Bangladesh</b>	BFTUC	BFTUC RAC
<b>Continue organizing social dialogue with relevant stakeholders</b>	BFTUC, MoEL, MoEFCC & employer federations	Bangladesh being a resource scarce society must internalize the culture of social dialoguing to avoid potential resource & political conflicts for its march toward a middle-income developing country

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