

Saleemul Huq (1952–2023)

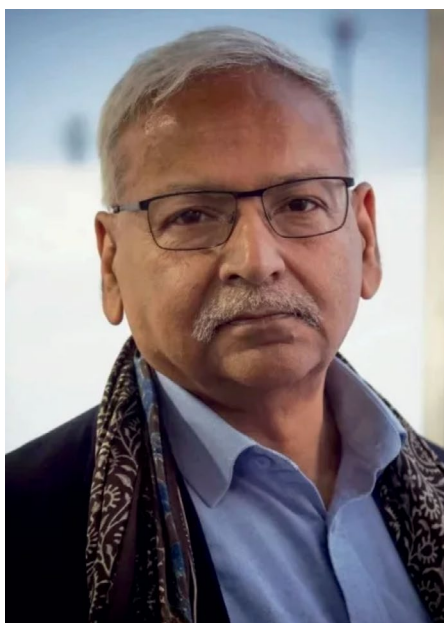
By Mizan R. Khan & Farhana Khan

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Saleemul (Saleem) Huq was one of the ten most influential climate experts, Advisor to the UAE COP 28 Presidency and Advisor to the UN Secretary General on Climate Change. However, beyond these and other distinctions, he was a compassionate soul who understood the human dimension of climate change to its core. His empathy for those most affected by increasingly extreme climate disasters fuelled his determination to find solutions that were not only scientifically sound but also just and inclusive. This was starkly evident in his relentless fight for realizing community-based and locally led adaptation, formalizing loss and damage, and enhancing capacity building to address climate change.

In pursuit of these goals, he created Gobeshona, a global research platform that has become an annual online event for sharing knowledge and practices as well as networking, covering all time zones. Moreover, to further climate change adaptation nationally and globally, he established the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) at Independent University, Bangladesh, in 2009, which welcomed students from a number of developing countries, and more than 50 visiting researchers from the Global North. Since its establishment, there have already been more than 500 visiting-researcher alumni. Saleem was also a pioneer of organizing learning events and institutions. The Least Developed Countries Universities Consortium on Climate Change (LUCCC), an official programme of the governments of least developed countries (LDCs), continues his legacy of supporting capacity building initiatives, which are direly needed in the most vulnerable countries. With Gobeshona and the LUCCC, Saleem led the organization of many online learning events in Bangladesh, as well as in LDCs in Asia and Africa. In addition, he mobilized projects for capacity building in LDCs.

Saleem contributed to a number of IPCC reports. He served as a lead author of the chapter on adaptation and sustainable development in the IPCC Third Assessment Report, and was one of two coordinating lead authors of 'Inter-relationships between adaptation and mitigation' in the IPCC's Fourth Assessment Report. Most of Saleem's academic publications focus on mainstreaming



adaptation into national sustainable development strategies in the Global South.

However, this obituary is not only about Saleem's laurels and professional accomplishments, but is also about sharing his inner soul and values, and is written by a close professional associate of 25 years and a representative of the younger generation who had the opportunity to observe his persona. He was an inspiring visionary with unbelievable clarity in his messaging to ensure climate justice, a concept so dearly held by him.

In the chaos of climate change, Saleem was an irreplaceable force, a resounding heartbeat in the symphony of climate science, policy and advocacy. One of the defining aspects of his legacy was his uncanny ability to bridge science and policy. For example, Saleem's pioneering evidence-based advocacy on loss and damage contributed significantly to its acceptance by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) parties as a formal agenda since COP19 in Warsaw, which established the Warsaw International Mechanism. This led to the final agreement at COP27 to establish a 'loss and damage fund and negotiate funding arrangements. Moreover, a number of countries, including Bangladesh, were persuaded to establish national loss and damage mechanisms.

Saleem's presence and voice reverberated from the halls of UN climate negotiations to the remote villages facing the brunt of climate change. In the vast tapestry of climate negotiations, Saleem stood as a voice for the voiceless. His impassioned pleas were clarion calls to world leaders to hear the cries of the most vulnerable. His evidence-based policy advocacy was a testament to an indomitable spirit that refused to be dimmed by the gravity of extreme climate events. Amidst the cold statistics of melting ice caps and rising sea levels, Saleem reminded us that behind every data point lies a story of human vulnerability and limitless suffering.

Beyond the datasets and policy discussions, Saleem was an inspiration, a mentor who touched the lives of many millions, particularly the youth, with his warmth and guidance. However, Saleem was more than a mentor; he was the steady hand guiding the young community through the tempest of unprecedented climate change impacts. His primary focus was the development of youth leadership in strengthening knowledge and research capacity building. For example, during the initial years of in-person Gobeshona conferences, Saleem arranged submissions of research works from young faculty members and researchers to award them with material and moral incentives. It is impossible to recall his infectious enthusiasm without feeling the weight of the responsibility he placed on all of our shoulders – the responsibility to ensure climate justice.

Saleem had the rare distinction of attending all the 27 COPs of the UNFCCC, but sadly we lost him just a month before COP28. As we bid farewell to this giant of the climate world, we call on the participants of upcoming COP events to continue his efforts to support the most vulnerable in the face of climate change. May his impact live on in the hearts and actions of those who he inspired.

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