

AIBS Travel Grant 2016 Final Report
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American Association of Geographers Annual Meeting presentation: *Threatening Dystopias: Regimes of Development and Climate Change Adaptation in Bangladesh*

The paper contributes to the field of Bangladesh studies by examining the history, discourses, understandings of, and responses to climate change in coastal Bangladesh today. It explores the politics of development and climate change adaptation and the ways in which they both shape and are shaped by ongoing ecological changes in the region. Often referred to as the most vulnerable country to climate change in the world, understanding the dynamics, history, and future of these threats to Bangladesh is critical to understanding the pasts and presents of the coastal region and Khulna in particular.

In particular, the paper is concerned with understanding the histories of intervention and landscape manipulation in the coastal region (both through contemporary and historical programs), and the ways in which they are linked to climate change and its impacts. In this sense, identifying the historical foundations of climate vulnerability is critical to understanding how these dynamics are linked with the destruction resulting from climate change. Subsuming the implications of these effects to discourses about climate change erases the much longer histories of development since the colonial period that have shaped ecological vulnerability in much of Bangladesh today.

The paper seeks to reframe understandings of this vulnerability around historical processes, suggesting a shift away from technical mitigation strategies to those which address the profoundly social and political nature of ecological transformation.

In the presentation, which was for a largely non-area expert audience, I situated these dynamics in relation to the narratives about impending disaster in Bangladesh with which most scholars in the audience were already familiar. Specifically, the audience was well aware of reports of the inundation and disappearance of large swathes of Bangladesh's coastal zone, as well as the narratives about climate refugees flooding out of this region. I was able to situate these dynamics in a deeper historical and socio-political context, highlighting the importance of a deeper understanding of this area to an appreciation of the effects of climate change in Bangladesh and elsewhere. As the country widely considered the "ground zero" of both climate change impacts and climate change adaptation, there is a great deal of interest among Geographers and other scholars in understanding how Bangladesh is addressing these challenges. It is a significant responsibility, then, of Bangladesh scholars who study this area, to situate current dynamics in relation to a deeper appreciation of the area and the rich scholarship from the broader field of Bangladesh Studies which informs it.