

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF LAW MANAGEMENT & HUMANITIES

[ISSN 2581-5369]

Volume 7 | Issue 2

2024

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Bangladesh's Sustainable Development Goals Implementation: Achieving Equitable Sustainability by Integrating Environmental Justice Principles

SANJOY BISWAS¹ AND TAHMINA SANZIDA SHAHID²

ABSTRACT

This article delves into the role of incorporating environmental justice principles into Bangladesh's efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). By examining the circumstances of the nation, the vulnerabilities faced by marginalized communities and the intricate link between social issues, it advocates for a comprehensive strategy to foster fair and sustainable development. The paper emphasizes the significance of environmental justice principles like participation, recognition, procedural fairness and substantive fairness in ensuring access to environmental benefits, fair distribution of environmental burdens and meaningful involvement of all communities. It also illustrates how these principles are relevant to SDGs such as eradicating poverty, addressing climate change and promoting health and well-being. Additionally, it delves into both the opportunities and obstacles associated with integrating environmental justice rules into Bangladesh's SDG agenda. While recognizing advantages stemming from government dedication, a civil society and opportunities for global collaboration along with innovative financial mechanisms are highlighted. Challenges, like limited awareness levels, conflicting priorities and data deficiencies are also acknowledged. The article wraps up by suggesting ways to promote fairness within Bangladesh's SDG framework, such, as enacting policy changes, conducting research and training programs, exploring new funding methods and ensuring thorough monitoring and assessment. It also proposes areas of study to delve into how environmental justice intersects with SDGs in developing nations. By giving importance to environmental justice principles and following the recommended actions, Bangladesh can make strides towards achieving sustainable development for all its people.

Keywords: Environmental Justice (EJ); Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Bangladesh; Equitable Sustainability; Implementation.

¹ Author is an Assistant Professor at Department of Law, Premier University, Chattogram, Bangladesh.

² Author is an Assistant Professor at Department of Law, Premier University, Chattogram, Bangladesh.

I. INTRODUCTION

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) were presented by the United Nations in 2015 as a strategy to attain development by 2030. These 17 interconnected goals cover areas like reducing poverty, ensuring food security, promoting education and healthcare and enhancing climate resilience, are significant for Bangladesh, an Asian country dealing with specific challenges such as poverty, climate risks and rapid urbanization. The SDGs offer a roadmap for addressing these complexities and realizing progress.³

Bangladesh's distinct geography and climate make groups specifically low income communities in coastal regions and river deltas—more susceptible to environmental dangers. Many of these communities bear the impact of climate change such as floods, salinization and cyclones which put their way of life, health and overall wellness at risk. The negative environmental effects of pollution and exploitation of resources often hit marginalized areas the hardest worsening existing disparities.⁴

In Bangladesh environmental justice plays a role in promoting inclusive development. It emphasizes that no group should face a share of risks based on factors like race, social class or where they live. Empowering marginalized communities by involving them in decision making processes regarding policies and projects is key to achieving fairness and sustainability for all. However, ensuring this participation through information sharing, inclusive discussions and effective ways to address grievances remains a challenge in Bangladesh.⁵

The historical legacy of colonialism and past development strategies in Bangladesh has left behind a trail of injustices. It is essential to acknowledge these wrongs and adopt sensitive approaches to rectify them in order to achieve fairness and sustainability for everyone.⁶

Having laws and effective governance is crucial for upholding environmental justice.⁷ Nonetheless in Bangladesh issues like law enforcement mechanisms, limited institutional capabilities and difficulties in holding polluters accountable still stand as hurdles. Improving frameworks enhancing implementation processes and promoting responsibility are vital steps

³ United Nations. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. (2015) <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>;

⁴ Social Watch Bangladesh. *Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in Bangladesh: Key Challenges and Missing Links: Focus should be on Internal Resource Mobilization and Effective Democratic Institutions* (2020) <https://www.socialwatch.org/node/18286>

⁵ Robert D. Bullard, *Dumping In Dixie : Race, Class, And Environmental Quality*, (2000) ,Third Edition; Routledge.

⁶ N Haque, *Environmental injustice in Bangladesh: A case study of the Chakoria Sundarbans*. Sustainability, Volume 11, Issue 9 (2019)

⁷ S. Ali, *Environmental governance in Bangladesh: Challenges and prospects*. Journal of Environmental Sustainability, Volume 8, Issue 1, 37-45. (2020).

toward safeguarding the rights of marginalized communities while fostering equitable outcomes, for the environment.⁸

To achieve inclusive sustainability in Bangladesh, it is crucial to focus on fairness. Empowering marginalized groups, addressing injustices, strengthening governance systems, enacting strong environmental regulations, ensuring proper enforcement and holding accountable those who harm the environment are crucial to raising awareness about the environment and education. By incorporating these principles into the pursuit of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), Bangladesh can lead the way toward a more fair, sustainable and inclusive future for all its people.

(A) Research Gap: Ensuring Equitable Sustainability in Bangladesh

Although Bangladesh has embraced the SDGs, there are research gaps when it comes to implementing them through an environmental justice perspective. Bangladesh's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) has research deficiencies in areas such as local context, community participation, monitoring and evaluation, intersectional analysis, and policy enforcement. Contemporary research frequently emphasizes national perspectives while overlooking disparities at the local level. There is insufficient research on the efficacy of methods for involving excluded communities in decision-making and implementation. Research should investigate how environmental injustices link with social inequality and evaluate the efficacy of initiatives that support environmental justice.

(B) Methodology:

The research is based on secondary data sources such as peer-reviewed journals, research reports, and books focusing on environmental justice, sustainable development, and the specific context of Bangladesh. National development plans, SDG progress reports, and environmental policies from government agencies Publications from the United Nations, World Bank, and other pertinent agencies on environmental justice, SDGs, and Bangladesh, as well as documents from local and international non-governmental organizations (NGOs) focusing on environmental justice and sustainable development in Bangladesh, were referenced for this paper.

We examined literature on EJ principles, their implementation in development settings, and obstacles encountered in Bangladesh. We thoroughly analyzed Bangladesh's SDG implementation methods and identified shortcomings or discrepancies in addressing

⁸ Id. 7 at 39

environmental justice.

We have analyzed Bangladesh's environmental justice approach in relation to global standards as set by United Nations. We have thoroughly examined secondary data sources to explore the concepts of environmental justice and its connection to the SDGs, analyze Bangladesh's specific obstacles related to environmental justice and SDG execution, and pinpoint any research and knowledge deficiencies. We used qualitative analytical techniques to examine the gathered data and pinpoint important themes and arguments present in the literature.

This research aims to offer significant insights and practical recommendations for attaining fair and enduring development in Bangladesh by utilizing analytical and comparative methods together with thorough secondary data analysis.

(C) Research Objectives:

This research aims to:

- i) Explore the integration of Environmental Justice (EJ) principles into Bangladesh's policies and programs to ensure equitable and inclusive sustainability in line with the country's unique challenges;
- ii) Evaluate the current integration of EJ principles within Bangladesh's SDG implementation strategies, policies, and frameworks, identifying existing gaps and limitations;
- iii) Develop context-specific recommendations for embedding EJ principles into various SDGs, considering Bangladesh's unique social, economic, and environmental context;
- iv) Assess the potential challenges and opportunities for implementing these recommendations, including capacity building, policy reforms, and stakeholder engagement;
- v) Fill a knowledge gap in Bangladesh by providing practical solutions for equitable and inclusive sustainability through environmental justice..
- vi) Propose policy and programmatic interventions for Bangladesh's government, civil society organizations, and other stakeholders to promote sustainable development through environmental justice principles.

(D) Research Questions:

The article focuses on the following research questions:

- i) How can environmental justice principles be effectively integrated into Bangladesh's SDG implementation, considering the unique challenges faced by the country, to ensure equitable and inclusive sustainability?
- ii) What institutional mechanisms and capacity building initiatives are necessary to facilitate effective implementation of environmental justice within the SDG framework?
- iii) How can capacity building and awareness raising initiatives be designed to empower communities to effectively utilize environmental justice principles as tools to hold polluters accountable and advocate for their environmental rights in the context of SDG implementation?

II. FINDINGS & ANALYSIS

(A) Vulnerabilities of different communities regarding environmental challenges:

Bangladesh is a densely populated and low-lying country that faces several environmental challenges such as floods, cyclones, droughts, saline intrusion, soil degradation, and pollution. Climate change exacerbates difficulties, posing substantial hazards to the country's food security, water resources, health, and livelihoods. Moreover, Bangladesh is experiencing rapid urbanization, industrialization, and economic growth, which is putting increasing pressure on the environment and natural resources.

Certain communities in Bangladesh are affected more by environmental challenges due to factors such as their geography, socio-economic status, gender, and ethnicity. Rural and coastal communities are more vulnerable to natural disasters and climate change since they heavily depend on agriculture, fishing, and natural resources for survival. Women, children, elderly adults, and disabled individuals are more susceptible to environmental dangers because they have restricted access to information, resources, and services, and are more exposed to prejudice and aggression. Indigenous and ethnic minorities, such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts people, face increased marginalization and difficulties as a result of land seizures, cultural erosion, and abuses of human rights. These communities often lack adequate representation and participation in decision-making processes that affect their environment and development.

The following are the most vulnerable communities who frequently face environmental challenges:

- 1) **Coastal communities:** Coastal communities are at risk of losing their means of living, food security, and potential displacement due to

increasing sea levels, salt contamination of farmland, and severe weather events resulting from climate change⁹.

- 2) **Indigenous communities:** Development projects, resource exploitation, and limited participation in environmental management choices have a substantial influence on the cultural traditions and overall well-being of indigenous communities by causing the loss of ancestral grounds.¹⁰
- 3) **Urban slum dwellers:** Industrial activities and ineffective waste management lead to air and water pollution, which can result in health issues like respiratory ailments and waterborne illnesses. They often lack access to adequate drinking water and sanitation facilities.¹¹
- 4) **Women and girls:** Gender inequalities exacerbate environmental vulnerabilities. Women often bear the burden of collecting water from polluted sources, managing household waste, and suffering health effects due to environmental degradation.¹²

(B) Progress in Achieving Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

- 1) **The Voluntary National Review 2020 (VNR 2020):** Bangladesh presented the VNR 2020 to the United Nations, providing a comprehensive overview of the country's progress in meeting the SDGs.¹³ The key points are:

- a. **Strategy focused on human-centered development:**

Bangladesh has adopted a people-centric development approach under the guidance of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina. Substantial socio-economic advancements have led to an increase in per capita income and a reduction in poverty. Bangladesh fulfilled all three criteria for advancing to a developing nation status in March 2018.

⁹ The World Bank Annual Report 2021; *From Crisis to Green, Resilient, and Inclusive Recovery (English)* <https://documents.worldbank.org/en/publication/documents-reports/documentdetail/120541633011500775/the-world-bank-annual-report-2021-from-crisis-to-green-resilient-and-inclusive-recovery>

¹⁰ UN Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, Reports by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (2023) <https://www.un.org/development/desa/indigenouspeoples/reports-by-the-special-rapporteur-on-the-rights-of-indigenous-peoples.html> 2023

¹¹ UN Habitat Annual Report 2021; <https://unhabitat.org/annual-report-2021>

¹² UN Women; Progress on the Sustainable Development Goals: The gender snapshot (2022) <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2022/09/progress-on-the-sustainable-development-goals-the-gender-snapshot-2022>

¹³ The Voluntary National Review (2020); <https://hlpf.un.org/countries/bangladesh/voluntary-national-review-2020>

b. COVID-19 Response and Stimulus Packages:

The government enacted comprehensive efforts to address the COVID-19 outbreak, focusing on health and socio-economic rehabilitation. An estimated US\$ 11.6 billion in stimulus measures, equivalent to 3.3% of GDP, were announced to be implemented by Fiscal Year 2023-24. Thorough Bangladesh's strategy for achieving SDGs is overseen by the "SDGs Implementation and Review Committee" during the VNR process. Stakeholders at different administrative tiers are actively engaged in implementing SDGs. Initiatives include SDGs Action Plans, SDGs Tracker, and a Financing Strategy.

c. Implementing the SDGs at a local level and guaranteeing inclusiveness:

40 essential indicators have been approved for the implementation of SDGs at a local level. The indicators facilitate the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), with a particular local indicator emphasizing the principle of "Leaving no one behind."

d. **Achievements:** The targets for under-five mortality and newborn mortality have been met. Tobacco usage rates, family planning needs, and poverty reduction rates are advancing as anticipated. Challenges remain in environmental justice, legal structures, and energy diversification. The review emphasizes the need for continuous efforts to integrate environmental justice principles and achieve equitable sustainability.¹⁴

2) The SDG Report 2023:

The SDG Report 2023 provides a preliminary assessment of Bangladesh's advancement towards the 2030 Agenda. The assessment evaluates progress, challenges, and areas requiring acceleration.

Bangladesh has made significant strides in alleviating poverty, enhancing healthcare, and promoting education. Under-five mortality rates have declined, and there has been an improvement in access to clean water and sanitation. The nation's commitment to the SDGs is evident. Bangladesh has achieved SDG 13 on climate action, although additional measures are needed to mitigate the effects of climate change. Bangladesh has effectively achieved SDG 12 on responsible consumption and production. Obstacles persist in the realms of environmental sustainability, inequality, and climatic resilience, despite partial advancements. The COVID-19

¹⁴ Id at 34

epidemic led to disruptions in economic activities and social services. Climate change poses a threat to vulnerable communities. Climate resilience projects do not fully incorporate environmental justice values. The southwestern coastal area is subject to climate-related risks. Bangladesh has customized the SDGs by concentrating on key indicators. Efforts are focused on promoting inclusion to prevent exclusion.¹⁵

Successes do not hide imperfections. Progress in reducing poverty is surpassing targets, but climate change poses a substantial threat to survival. Marginalized communities are disproportionately affected by rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and river erosion, demonstrating an unbalanced distribution of burdens. Environmental deterioration exacerbates inequity. Industrial locations with severe air and water pollution present health risks to low-income residents. Improper treatment of industrial waste intensifies the problem. Unequal access to environmental resources persists. Despite improvements, disparities in access to clean water and sanitation exist, particularly in rural areas. This sustains current social imbalances. Climate adaptation and resilience approaches need improvement. Environmental governance and justice institutions demand strengthening. Bangladesh is far behind than the expected level in boosting regional collaboration to achieve SDGs.

3) Environmental Justice Principles having particular significance for Bangladesh to ensure fair sustainability:

Achieving sustainable development in Bangladesh requires a thorough examination through the lens of environmental justice. Bangladesh's adoption of the SDGs demonstrates a dedication to attaining a prosperous and sustainable future for everyone. To achieve genuine equitable and inclusive sustainability, it is essential to incorporate principles of environmental justice (EJ) into the implementation process. This section examines essential EJ principles and analyzes their connection to certain SDGs,

Following EJ principles hold particular significance for Bangladesh:

a. Recognition:

This principle recognizes the varied knowledge systems, values, and cultural practices of different communities, especially indigenous peoples and marginalized groups, in relation to their environment and its management.

Whyte emphasizes the significance of acknowledging the historical background of environmental injustices and the role of traditional ecological knowledge in creating sustainable

¹⁵ The Sustainable Development Goals Report by United Nations (2023), <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/>

remedies.¹⁶

Recognizing and respecting the wisdom of knowledge systems is vital, for crafting effective environmental policies. It's important to acknowledge the challenges faced by groups in the past and present to address historical injustices and build trust.¹⁷

b. Participation:

This principle emphasizes the right of all individuals and communities to actively participate in decisions that affect their environment. This includes providing opportunities for sharing information, public input and involvement in shaping policies and projects.

A study by Agyeman and Evans explored how citizen science initiatives could empower groups to engage in monitoring and decision making.¹⁸

Ali advocates for strategies those are culturally sensitive recognizing the diverse needs and perspectives of different communities.¹⁹

Participation ensures that marginalized communities have a say in decisions regarding their environment and development allowing their viewpoints and concerns to be recognized.²⁰

c. Substantive Fairness:

This principle ensures that outcomes of decision making processes are fair and impartial for all individuals and communities. It involves avoiding the burden of harm, on vulnerable populations while ensuring that all communities benefit from environmental policies and initiatives.

In the year 2022 a research project delved into the concept of “gentrification” exploring how environmental efforts could lead to displacement and loss for communities.²¹

Moving from procedural to substantive fairness is crucial, for ensuring that marginalized groups receive tangible benefits. It's important to distribute advantages and disadvantages to achieve

¹⁶ Patrina Whyte & Geoffrey Lamberton; *Conceptualising Sustainability Using a Cognitive Mapping Method* ;ORCID School of Business and Tourism, Southern Cross University, Bilinga, QLD 4225, Australia;(2020)

¹⁷ G. Kibria, Environmental justice and the fight for clean air in Bangladesh. *The Third World Quarterly*, Volume 43, Issue 12, 2743-2761. (2022).

¹⁸ J Agyeman and T Evans, ‘Towards Just Sustainability in Urban Communities: Building Equity Rights with Sustainable Solutions.’ *Annals of American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 590 ;35-53. (2003)

¹⁹ S. Ali, *Environmental justice and the pursuit of sustainable development in Bangladesh*. *Journal of Environmental Law*, Volume 31, Issue 2, 277-302. (2019).

²⁰F. Hossain, *Environmental justice and the politics of participation in Bangladesh: A case study of the Rampal power plant project*; *Journal of Environmental Law*, Volume 30, Issue 1, 119-142. (2018).

²¹ Jessica Quinton ;*How well do we know green gentrification? A systematic review of the methods* Volume 46, Issue 4(2022)

genuine fairness, where no one group bears an unequal share of negative impacts.²²

d. Procedural Fairness:

This principle guarantees that all individuals and communities have equitable and unbiased access to environmental decision-making processes. This encompasses transparent and accessible procedures, clear transmission of information, and the capacity to challenge decisions.

Procedural fairness impacts trust in environmental decision-making and helps decrease environmental inequities.²³

Maintaining procedural justice in environmental decision-making has multifarious difficulties, especially for underrepresented groups dealing with power disparities.²⁴

It is essential to have clear and accessible decision-making processes, together with effective grievance redressal channels, to empower communities for successful engagement.²⁵

4) Integration of EJ Principles with Specific SDGs: Bangladesh Perspective

In this section, we will analyze how EJ principles can be integrated in implementing SDGs in Bangladesh.

a. SDG 1: No Poverty:

Empowering marginalized groups to collaborate in creating and overseeing poverty alleviation programs is essential to ensuring interventions meet their specific needs and foster sustainable livelihoods.

A people-centered approach to poverty eradication should stress empowering persons living in poverty. This entails engaging people in every facet of decision-making, which includes designing and implementing policies. Empowering communities to participate in designing interventions increases their commitment to the success of the initiatives.

Marginalized groups encounter distinct obstacles that are typically influenced by historical, cultural, and geographical factors. Communities can contribute their knowledge about local

²² *Supranote* 19 at 286

²³ Jonathan Skinner-Thompson; *Procedural Environmental Justice Procedural Environmental Justice*, Washington Law Review, Volume 97 Number 2 6-1-2022, <https://digitalcommons.law.uw.edu/wlr>

²⁴ Dr. Andrew A. Millward and Dr. Sara Edge, Examining environmental justice in urban forest management and decision-making, Thesis for Ph.d at Toronto Metropolitan University (October 2023), DOI:10.13140/RG.2.2.36077.97764

²⁵ Growing Together: Poverty Alleviation, Community Building, and Environmental Justice through Home Gardens in Pacoima, Los Angeles; https://www.liebertpub.com/doi/full/10.1089/env.2015.0005?casa_token=pbSs1A2CquEAAAAA%3AwKLSuS3q2CNAvmR-rFU3GXOZFZC2PyCF7tjh_HaKaiQb2B-5hoqKerL1bG2iz-I_R52mpgoxQm7QaZ-SQQ

conditions, preferences, and limits by actively engaging in project design. This guarantees that actions are customized to meet their precise requirements.

Participatory techniques enable people to find sustainable livelihood prospects instead of imposing top-down solutions. They can utilize their current abilities, resources, and connections to establish activities that generate cash. Agricultural projects that engage local farmers in decision-making typically produce superior outcomes.

It is essential to prioritize gender-responsive involvement. Women, who frequently experience the main impact of poverty, need to be actively involved. Understanding their views on income creation, education, health, and family dynamics is crucial for comprehensive poverty reduction.

Non-governmental organizations and community-based organizations: NGOs are crucial in enabling community involvement. Their knowledge and expertise can help lead the process, making sure that disadvantaged perspectives are listened to.

When marginalized groups engage in poverty alleviation efforts, it goes beyond charity and promotes sustainable change.

Procedural fairness is essential, as it involves transparent resource allocation and clear grievance channels to prevent prejudice and enable communities to hold local authorities accountable.

Procedural fairness is crucial for attaining the goal of eradicating poverty (SDG 1). Transparent resource allocation and explicit grievance processes lead to multiple good results.

Transparency in allocation guarantees that local authorities can be held accountable for their decisions. Communities can vigilantly oversee the allocation of resources and contest any prejudiced practices.

Empowerment is achieved through procedural justice by engaging communities in decision-making processes. They develop a feeling of ownership over poverty alleviation efforts and are able to advocate for their individual requirements.

Conflict prevention is achieved by the implementation of clear procedures, which decrease the probability of conflicts stemming from unjust resource distribution. Perceiving fairness reduces the likelihood of individuals resorting to grievances or disagreements.

Equity ensures that resources are distributed to those in greatest need, promoting fairness. It fosters equity by rectifying historical imbalances and advocating for equal access.

Procedural fairness is both ethically correct and strategically essential for successful poverty reduction. It cultivates public backing, maintains changes, and promotes comprehensive

growth.

b. SDG 2 : Zero Hunger:

The government has to acknowledge the unequal impact of environmental damage on disadvantaged groups, especially in terms of food security.²⁶

Concerned authorities need to guarantee the meaningful involvement of marginalized communities in decision-making processes concerning land use, agricultural methods, and food systems.²⁷

The government shall create systems to handle complaints on land dispossession, unjust trade practices, and environmental pollution that affect food security.²⁸

Enhancing sustainable and climate-resilient practices in agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, while increasing the productivity and income of small-scale farmers, fishers, and forest inhabitants, is essential for attaining SDG 2. Enhancing food security and nutrition for all groups, particularly women, children, and the elderly, through methods such as food fortification, school feeding, and dietary diversification can lead to substantial improvements.

c. SDG 3: Good Health and Well-being:

It is important to recognize the connection between environmental pollution and health inequalities, especially in underprivileged groups living close to industrial areas.

The goal of Good Health and Well-being is to reduce unnecessary suffering and untimely death caused by preventable diseases by targeting specific factors that improve the health of a nation's people. Marginalized communities, which have been traditionally excluded from participating in our cities, encounter further obstacles to civic engagement. These neighborhoods, frequently affected by social disparities, live in close proximity to industrial areas with high levels of environmental contamination. Air and water quality are crucial factors that significantly impact health. Studies indicate that contaminated surroundings have a greater impact on communities of color, resulting in health inequities and higher mortality rates, which are worsened by institutional racism. In order to accomplish SDG 3, it is essential to acknowledge and tackle these inequalities, guaranteeing that health and well-being are within reach for everyone.

Procedural fairness in administrative law focuses on ensuring fairness in the methods used

²⁶ *Supranote. 5*

²⁷ The FAO, *"The State of Food and Agriculture 2021: Transforming food systems for food and nutrition security"* (2021), <https://www.fao.org/documents/card/en?details=cb4474en>

²⁸ The UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), "Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights", https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/guidingprinciplesbusinesshr_en.pdf

during decision-making. Participatory community monitoring is crucial in the realm of environmental justice. By including local communities, we give them the authority to supervise projects that affect their lives. This method is especially applicable in regions impacted by extractive industries like mining, oil, and gas, as well as significant infrastructure developments. Community-led monitoring fills data gaps, supports environmental human rights, enhances government monitoring capabilities, and encourages cooperation and peace building. Procedural fairness must be upheld to guarantee equal access to environmental protection in Bangladesh.

Enhancing the health system and infrastructure, and improving the reach and standard of health services, particularly for rural, urban poor, and marginalized people, is crucial. It is crucial to decrease the susceptibility of all communities to environmental health hazards such waterborne, vector-borne, and respiratory infections, and improve their access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene.

d. SDG 4: Quality Education:

It is important to recognize the unequal effect of environmental deterioration on marginalized communities' ability to obtain high-quality education, primarily caused by limited resources and forced relocation.

Communities impacted will participate in creating and implementing environmental education initiatives to ensure their perspectives and insights are considered.

To rectify historical and continuing environmental injustices, educational opportunities must be provided to bridge knowledge gaps. Communities must be empowered to campaign for their rights.

e. SDG 5: Gender Equality:

Authorities have to examine the gendered dimensions of environmental concerns, recognizing that women frequently experience the most severe consequences of environmental degradation and climate change effects.

The government must guarantee women's equitable involvement in decision-making processes concerning environmental management and resource distribution.

The government needs to implement policies and initiatives that cater to the unique requirements and weaknesses of women in relation to environmental concerns, like ensuring access to clean water and sanitation.

f. SDG 6: Clean Water and Sanitation:

The government must recognize the disparity in obtaining clean water caused by environmental pollution and resource extraction.²⁹ The state shall promote the involvement of local people in water resource management, sanitation planning, and decision-making about infrastructure projects.

The government needs to provide accessible and efficient grievance redressal systems for communities dealing with water contamination, insufficient sanitation, and limited access to clean water.³⁰

Enhancing the administration and oversight of water resources, and guaranteeing fair and sustainable distribution and utilization of water across various sectors and consumers is essential. Increasing the availability and affordability of clean drinking water and sanitation for all people, particularly those residing in slums, remote, and coastal regions, is crucial.

g. SDG 7: Affordable and Clean Energy:

Bangladesh shall acknowledge the environmental inequities linked to conventional energy sources such as coal, which frequently affect low-income populations to a greater extent.³¹

Bangladesh must promote community involvement in the planning and execution of renewable energy initiatives, guaranteeing local ownership and authority in decision-making.³²

Authorities must implement stringent environmental legislation to hold polluters accountable and provide solutions for affected populations.³³

It is essential to increase the accessibility of clean and renewable energy sources like solar, wind, and biogas while decreasing reliance on fossil fuels and biomass. Improving energy efficiency and conservation across all sectors and users, while encouraging the involvement and empowerment of local communities in energy planning and management, is essential.

h. SDG 8: Decent Work and Economic Growth:

The government must recognize the environmental impact experienced by communities

²⁹ Integrating environmental justice into the implementation of the water and sanitation-related Sustainable Development Goals and targets, <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/water-and-sanitation/>

³⁰ *Id* at 12

³¹ Unlocking Bangladesh's renewable energy potential ,(Jul 13, 2023) ; <https://www.thedailystar.net/opinion/views/news/unlocking-bangladeshs-renewable-energy-potential-3367231>

³² The International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) report, "*Renewable Energy Benefits: Reaching the most vulnerable*", https://www.irena.org/-/media/Files/IRENA/Agency/Publication/2017/Nov/IRENA_Understanding_Socio_Economics_2017.pdf

³³ The UN Environment Programme (UNEP) "Guidelines for the Development of National Legislation on Environmental Impact Assessment", <https://wedocs.unep.org/bitstream/handle/20.500.11822/13595/rsrs122.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>

residing near polluting industry and extractive enterprises.³⁴

The authorities must encourage the involvement of workers and communities in environmental impact assessments and legislation concerning industrial activity.³⁵

Bangladesh needs to implement labor laws and environmental regulations to safeguard workers from unsafe working conditions and communities from environmental contamination.³⁶

i. SDG 9: Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure:

Authorities must evaluate the environmental and social effects of infrastructure development projects, particularly on marginalized groups residing near industrial areas or at risk of displacement from infrastructure projects.

The government shall involve impacted communities in the planning, design, and execution of infrastructure projects, making sure their issues are considered and advantages are distributed fairly.

Bangladesh needs to establish systems to hold polluters responsible and offer compensation for environmental harm, emphasizing the empowerment of communities to address environmental injustices.

j. SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities:

It is crucial for authorities to recognize the impact of injustices, on existing inequalities especially affecting marginalized communities who bear the brunt of pollution, depletion of resources and climate change. Ensuring that all communities regardless of their status have access to information decision making processes and the benefits of environmental laws and programs is imperative.

Bangladesh should implement policies and initiatives tailored to address the needs of disadvantaged populations disproportionately impacted by environmental degradation and climate change.

k. SDG 11: Sustainable Cities and Communities:

Authorities need to acknowledge the consequences of urbanization and unplanned development

³⁴ Spencer Banzhaf, Lala Ma, Christopher Timmins, *Environmental Justice: The Economics of Race, Place, and Pollution*, *The Journal of Economic Perspectives*, Vol. 33, No. 1; 185-208, (2019), <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26566983>

³⁵ The International Labour Organization (ILO) guidelines on "Green Jobs"; <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/green-jobs/lang--en/index.htm>

³⁶ The UN Environment Programme (UNEP); "Post-Conflict Environmental Assessment: A Guide for Planners, Peacekeepers and Reconstruction Workers" <https://www.unep.org/topics/disasters-and-conflicts/country-presence/cote-divoire/post-conflict-environmental-assessment>

on environmental disparities particularly felt by vulnerable populations facing challenges such as inadequate housing, lack of sanitation facilities and exposure to pollution. Involving communities in planning is essential to consider their perspectives and fulfill their unique requirements in urban revitalization projects.

Addressing injustices faced by urban dwellers including inadequate access to green spaces, sanitation facilities and secure housing should be a top priority. Solutions must focus on promoting equity while ensuring sustainability.

l. SDG 12: Responsible Consumption and Production:

Authorities must understand how unsustainable consumption patterns in countries contribute to environmental degradation in Bangladesh impacting the livelihoods and health of marginalized groups.

The government aims to encourage Bangladeshi communities to participate in conversations about consumption and production practices making sure their suggestions are taken into account. Bangladesh should establish international partnerships to ensure that developed nations are held responsible for their actions that impact developing countries.

m. SDG 13: Climate Action:

Climate Action stresses the need to address climate change and its far reaching effects. Recognizing the vulnerabilities of communities and indigenous groups to climate change impacts is crucial. Tailoring adaptation strategies to meet their needs is key to build a resilience against climate change.

Coastal regions face challenges from climate change such as sea level rise, erosion and frequent storms which directly affect the livelihoods, cultural heritage and well-being of coastal populations.

Indigenous communities have connections with their environments offering valuable insights for adaptation. It is important to acknowledge their role, as stewards of these ecosystems and tailor adaptation approaches accordingly. One size fits all solutions won't suffice; adaptation strategies must be tailored to meet the needs of communities and indigenous peoples by actively involving them in decision making processes.

Of solely relying on structures, like sea walls we should explore softer engineering options. These alternatives include beach nourishment, sand dunes and ecosystem based methods that align with practices. While modern coastal flood barriers can safeguard lives and property they may inadvertently disrupt standing customs tied to livelihoods. Protecting land with armor rocks

could block access to beaches and impact fishing based livelihoods. These approaches bolster resilience and sustainability.

The push for climate action underscores the need to tackle climate change and it is reaching impacts. Ensuring access to climate funding and resources is vital for achieving equity in this endeavor. Groups that are marginalized or face heightened vulnerability to climate related issues. By prioritizing their needs we can facilitate a transition to an eco-friendly economy. Capital markets play a role in advancing climate action preserving the environment and bolstering resilience. We have to collaborate to safeguard our civilization and secure a future for all.

Giving precedence to the implementation of Bangladesh's determined contributions (NDCs) and National Adaptation Plan (NAP) along with mobilizing technical and institutional resources, for climate mitigation and adaptation is imperative. It is important to enhance the engagement and participation of all communities, those affected and vulnerable, in both local and global climate conversations and efforts.

n. SDG 14: Life Below Water:

Bangladesh shall acknowledge the disproportionate effects of climate change and ocean deterioration on coastal populations, especially in terms of livelihoods and cultural traditions.³⁷ The government requires assisting coastal communities in actively contributing to the development of solutions for marine conservation, sustainable fishing methods, and plans for adapting to climate change.³⁸

The government must enact appropriate laws and systems to prevent illicit fishing, safeguard marine biodiversity, and provide restitution for communities impacted by marine pollution and overexploitation.

Preserving and reviving biodiversity and ecosystem services in marine and terrestrial ecosystems, while also guaranteeing the sustainable utilization and administration of natural resources, is essential. It is essential to protect and support the rights and livelihoods of local and indigenous communities who rely on marine and terrestrial resources, and to strengthen their involvement and ability in conservation and restoration activities.

³⁷ The UN document "The Jakarta Mandate on Marine and Coastal Biodiversity"; <https://enb.iisd.org/biodiv/sbstta/sb214.html>

³⁸ A sustainable ocean by 2030, https://www.iied.org/sustainable-ocean-2030?gad_source=1&gclid=CjwKCAiA_5WvBhBAEiwAZtCU71ohpVvGzyie8ZtVJIB3gpiqgpOUGyfoo5wwv-J61pLyJPCT0pxdyxoCVYsQAvD_BwE

o. SDG 15: Life on Land:

The state must recognize the unequal effects of deforestation, land degradation, and biodiversity loss on vulnerable populations that depend on natural resources for their livelihoods.

Government agencies require collaborating with local communities in conservation endeavors, assuring their involvement in decision-making and reaping the benefits of sustainable resource management techniques.

Bangladesh needs to enforce systems to compensate people affected by displacement or loss of income from conservation efforts to promote a fair transition to sustainable land management practices.

p. SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions:

The government needs to recognize the connection between environmental deterioration, limited resources, and conflict, emphasizing the importance of fair and comprehensive environmental management.

The state requires enhancing methods for public involvement in environmental decision-making and ensuring access to justice for environmental rights infringements.

Bangladesh must establish strong legal frameworks and enforcement tools to hold polluters responsible and guarantee environmental justice for impacted populations.

q. SDG 17: Partnerships for the Goals:

The state must recognize that attaining environmental justice necessitates international cooperation and coordination among stakeholders, such as governments, companies, and civil society organizations.

Bangladesh shall prioritize partnerships that promote the involvement of underprivileged populations in global environmental governance processes.

The government shall promote international collaborations to rectify past and present environmental injustices, guaranteeing fair access to resources and technology essential for sustainable progress.³⁹

5) Challenges and Opportunities

In order to address socio-environmental issues—particularly in Bangladesh, where poverty, gender inequality, and climate vulnerability intersect—this section examines how EJ principles

³⁹ Achieving Sustainable Development and Promoting Development Cooperation Dialogues at the Economic and Social Council, https://www.un.org/en/ecosoc/docs/pdfs/fina_08-45773.pdf

can be incorporated into Bangladesh's SDGs. It also highlights the opportunities and challenges that come with this work.

a. Challenges:

i. Climate Change and Environmental Degradation:

Rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and river erosion threaten lives, livelihoods, and infrastructure, disproportionately impacting marginalized communities in Bangladesh.⁴⁰

Industrial waste mismanagement and pollution exacerbate health risks, particularly for low-income communities residing near industrial zones.⁴¹

ii. Gender Inequality:

Women often lack land rights and decision-making power, making them more vulnerable to the impacts of climate change and environmental degradation.⁴²

Unequal access to resources and information further marginalizes women in climate adaptation and mitigation efforts.

iii. Economic Inequality:

Poverty restricts access to clean water, sanitation, and sustainable livelihoods, increasing vulnerability to environmental hazards.⁴³ The economic burden of environmental disasters disproportionately falls on low-income communities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty.

iv. Non integration of Environmental Justice (EJ) approaches:

EJ principles are not fully integrated into the initiatives aimed for achieving the SDGs. The southern coastal region is vulnerable to climate-related hazards. Environmental governance and justice systems are not sufficiently equipped to develop climate resilience and render environmental justice to the aggrieved persons.⁴⁴

v. Lack of Capacity: Insufficient awareness and comprehension of environmental justice principles among different stakeholders, such as government officials, community leaders, and the public, provide a major

⁴⁰ CHAPTER FIFTEEN: ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE CHANGE AND DEVELOPMENT ; https://mof.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/mof.portal.gov.bd/page/f2d8fabbb_29c1_423a_9d37_cdb500260002/Chapter-15%20%28English-2023%29%20.pdf

⁴¹ HOUSEHOLD INCOME AND EXPENDITURE SURVEY HIES 2022; https://bbs.portal.gov.bd/sites/default/files/files/bbs.portal.gov.bd/page/57def76a_aa3c_46e3_9f80_53732eb94a83/2023-04-13-09-35-ee41d2a35dcc47a94a595c88328458f4.pdf

⁴² UN Women. „State of Gender Equality and Climate Change in Bangladesh.,(2022) <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2021/01/climate-change-gender-equality-and-human-rights-in-asia>

⁴³ The World Bank (2023). <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/bangladesh/overview>

⁴⁴ The Sustainable Development Goals Report by United Nations 2023: <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/>

obstacle. Moreover, developing the ability for significant community involvement and efficient enforcement methods necessitates certain resources and knowledge.⁴⁵

- vi. **Competing Priorities:** Short-term economic objectives frequently take precedence over environmental and social fairness considerations. Emphasizing short-term requirements at the expense of long-term sustainability might result in sacrifices that unfairly affect vulnerable people.⁴⁶
- vii. **Vested Interests:** Powerful entities like industrial conglomerates or political leaders may oppose changes that jeopardize their financial interests, even if those changes support environmental fairness. To overcome resistance and ensure accountability, strong legal frameworks and clear decision-making processes are necessary.⁴⁷
- viii. **Data Gaps and Monitoring Challenges:** The absence of thorough data on how environmental responsibilities and benefits are distributed hampers the development of effective policies and tracking of progress towards environmental justice under the SDGs. Creating reliable data collecting and analysis systems is essential.⁴⁸
- ix. **The COVID-19 pandemic and post COVID-19 New Normal:**

The COVID-19 epidemic has significantly hindered Bangladesh's advancement towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).⁴⁹ It has caused disturbances in health systems, economics, and societal well-being. The exclusion of Environmental Justice concepts has worsened vulnerabilities.⁵⁰ It has been exceedingly tough to ensure fair distribution of vaccines, establish strong health infrastructure, and use financial assistance for gender equality, education, and climate mitigation. International solidarity, climate funding, and debt relief were significantly impacted by the epidemic.⁵¹ Immediate steps are required to adapt to the "New

⁴⁵ Environmental Justice Securing our right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment by UNDP Bangladesh, (2022); <https://www.undp.org/sites/g/files/zskgke326/files/2022-06/Environmental-Justice-Technical-Report.pdf>

⁴⁶ Green Growth and Developing Countries-consultation draft(2012), <https://www.oecd.org/dac/environment-development/50559116.pdf>

⁴⁷ Md. Mujibul Haque Munir, *Bangladesh Needs to Fight Against Illicit Finance Flow and to Achieve SDGs* Equity and Justice Working Group Bangladesh (EquityBD) (2018), <https://www.socialwatch.org/node/18286>

⁴⁸ *Supranote* 44 at 23

⁴⁹ Climate financing for sustainable development budget report 2023-24, <https://knowledgehub.pksf.org.bd/collections/Q1luNzBjNmV4UGE2TTZsbHczNU1YQT09>

⁵⁰ COVID-19 Wreaking Havoc on Bangladesh's Poor: A Story of Food, Cash, and Health Crises, (August 31 2021) <https://sdg.iisd.org/commentary/guest-articles/covid-19-wreaking-havoc-on-bangladeshs-poor-a-story-of-food-cash-and-health-crises/>

⁵¹ Leaving No One Behind: Impact of COVID-19 on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

Normal."

Opportunities for progress include empowering civil society, promoting international cooperation, and utilizing innovative financing mechanisms for environmental justice projects. Challenges require a multi-pronged approach, including building awareness, strengthening capacity, fostering collaboration, effective communication, overcoming resistance from vested interests, and investing in data collection systems and research institutions.

b. Opportunities:

i. Bangladesh Government's Commitment in Climate financing:

The Bangladesh government's report on "Climate financing for sustainable development budget 2023-24" emphasizes the country's dedication to attaining SDGs and executing environmental justice projects. As per the report, Bangladesh emphasizes the need for more resources to be allocated to climate-related programs and activities, which now account for around 9% of the overall budget for 25 relevant ministries. Ministries such as Environment, Water Resources, Agriculture, Fisheries, and Disaster Management are to play significant roles in climate adaptation and mitigation. Government has taken initiatives to integrate climate change considerations into public financial management. This involves incorporating climate change effects (mitigation and adaptation) into the budget formula process and Ministry budget frameworks. Government prioritizes the implementation of the National Adaptation Plan (NAP) for the years 2023-2050 as a fundamental framework for upcoming investments in addressing climate change. As initiatives for Environmental Justice, BDT 37,052 crore has been allocated for climate-related programs, demonstrating a sustained commitment to tackling environmental issues. Proposed community involvement in budget processes can be interpreted as an implicit attempt to empower vulnerable populations, which is a component of environmental justice. Government intends to reduce pollution from multiple sources to address environmental health inequities. Bangladesh emphasizes providing fair access to clean water and sanitation, which may help address environmental justice issues related to these vital resources. Government activities involve community participation, catastrophe risk reduction, and gender-responsive ways to achieve environmental justice.⁵²

ii. Civil Society Engagement:

Bangladesh possesses a dynamic civil society scene that fervently promotes environmental

(August 13, 2021), <https://www.undp.org/publications/leaving-no-one-behind-impact-covid-19-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs>

⁵² The Bangladesh government's report on "Climate financing for sustainable development budget 2023-24", <https://knowledgehub.pksf.org.bd/collections/Q1luNzBjNmV4UGE2TTZsbHczNU1YQT09>

justice and community rights. Working together with and strengthening these groups can offer significant insights, expertise, and engage communities to participate effectively.

iii. International Cooperation:

Bangladesh can utilize international alliances and assistance from development agencies to enhance capacity, access technical experience, and obtain financial resources for executing environmental justice projects aligned with the SDG framework.⁵³ Cooperation among South Asian nations is crucial for attaining sustainable development.

iv. Innovative Financing Mechanisms:

Considering different funding methods like green bonds, impact investment, and climate finance can assist in raising funds for initiatives that support environmental equity and sustainable growth.⁵⁴

v. Leveraging Technology:

Digital tools can enhance transparency, accountability, and community participation in environmental justice programs by facilitating data gathering, information sharing, and integrating people in decision-making.⁵⁵

III. SUGGESTIONS

(A) Policy and Legislation:

- a. **Creating a National Environmental Justice Policy:** This policy should precisely outline environmental justice concepts and set up a structure for their application throughout all SDGs. The proposal may consist of community-based environmental monitoring, grievance redressal mechanisms, equitable access to information, participation in decision-making processes, integration of environmental justice principles into environmental impact assessments and development plans, and enhancing enforcement of current environmental regulations, especially in marginalized communities.

⁵³ Prospects and Opportunities of International Cooperation in Attaining SDG Targets in Bangladesh General Economics Division (GED) Bangladesh Planning Commission Ministry of Planning Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh (Global Partnership in Attainment of the SDGs),(September 2019)https://sdg.gov.bd/public/img/upload/resources/5f5deb0bcab49_doc_file.pdf

⁵⁴ UNCTAD, *Debt, and Climate: Realigning the Global Financial Architecture 2023* https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/tdr2023_en.pdf

⁵⁵ *Supranote* 43 at 14

b. Assessing and amending current environmental legislation and regulations:

Policy makers must guarantee that current environmental laws and regulations are in accordance with environmental justice principles and target the particular vulnerabilities of marginalized populations. This may include passing laws to ensure the right to a healthy environment, enhancing legal structures for environmental impact evaluations and social protections, and simplifying the process for communities to pursue environmental justice through legal action.

(B) Institutional Reforms:

a. Creation of specialized Environmental Justice Units within appropriate government departments:

Government entities are mandated to establish Environmental Justice Units, which are responsible, for coordinating the execution of the National Environmental Justice Policy promoting community engagement in decision making processes ensuring adherence to environmental justice principles and bolstering the capabilities of both government bodies and communities in addressing environmental justice concerns.

b. Improving cooperation with civil society groups:

To foster ties with civil society organizations, government agencies are required to collaborate with governmental organizations (NGOs), community based groups and indigenous communities to encourage community participation, information sharing and local initiatives aimed at addressing specific environmental justice issues.

c. Fostering awareness and education about the environment:

Raising awareness and providing education on matters is crucial for stakeholders, including government officials, communities and businesses. It is important that they grasp the concepts of justice Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and their interconnectedness.

(C) Study and Enhancement of Capabilities:

a. Investigating how several SDGs may affect EJ:

Investigating the environmental justice implications of SDGs in Bangladesh is imperative. This research aims to support policy development, identify knowledge gaps and guide research endeavors

b. Improving competencies and abilities: Enhancing competencies and resources across government agencies, communities and civil society organizations

involves offering training on environmental justice principles, processes, data collection, analysis techniques and advocacy skills development.

- c. **Establishment of a national information portal:** Establishing a knowledge platform focusing on justice and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) is crucial. The platform should share research findings, best practices and resources, with all stakeholders.

(D) Financing:

- a. **Setting aside enough money resources:**

When it comes to financing it's important to prioritize allocating resources for environmental justice programs. This can involve setting up funding sources within government departments creating partnerships between private sectors and seeking support from donors.

- b. **Looking into innovative funding strategies:** Exploring funding methods like carbon pricing, environmental taxes and investments that support community led projects and sustainable technologies can also be beneficial.

(E) Monitoring and Evaluation:

- a. **Developing accurate measures to track progress:**

In terms of monitoring progress it's essential to establish metrics to track advancements in justice aligned with the SDGs. These metrics should assess both qualitative aspects such as community engagement, resource accessibility and distributional impacts.

- b. **Ensuring that environmental justice programs are consistently observed and assessed:**

Consistently monitoring and evaluating environmental justice programs is crucial. Using approaches and ensuring community involvement in decision making processes are vital, for evaluation.

- c. **Publicizing research results and best practices broadly:** The sharing of research findings and effective methods plays a role, in promoting transparency, accountability and knowledge exchange among sectors and interested parties.

IV. CONCLUSION

Embracing justice is not just a moral imperative but a strategic approach towards achieving sustainable fairness in Bangladesh. The article underscores the importance of integrating environmental justice principles into Bangladesh's efforts to meet the Sustainable Development

Goals (SDGs). It stresses the necessity of adopting a strategy for ensuring sustainable development in Bangladesh taking into account its unique circumstances. By exploring the vulnerabilities of marginalized communities and the interconnectedness of social issues the article highlights the significance of environmental justice concepts. Key principles such as participation, recognition, substantive fairness and procedural fairness are vital for ensuring access to benefits, fair distribution of burdens and meaningful community engagement in decision making processes. The article also demonstrates how these concepts are critical for achieving SDGs, like poverty alleviation, climate action and promoting health and well-being. To effectively integrate environmental justice principles into Bangladesh's SDG implementation it is essential to address existing challenges while leveraging opportunities.

Despite facing challenges the prospects offered by a society global partnerships, innovative funding approaches, leveraging technology enhancing expertise and legal frameworks pave the way, for a promising trajectory of progress. Obstacles such as lack of awareness, competing priorities, vested interests, data scarcity and the complex post COVID 19 landscape present challenges.

The piece proposes remedies to advance equity in Bangladesh's implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). These include establishing a policy on justice strengthening collaborations with civil society organizations and researching the specific implications of the SDGs. It is crucial to allocate resources explore new funding mechanisms and establish transparent monitoring and evaluation processes.

Further investigation is needed to understand the needs and barriers encountered by marginalized communities in Bangladesh concerning justice. A deeper understanding of how environmental justice intersects with economic development policies in Bangladesh could inform sustainable development strategies. By comparing developing countries facing obstacles valuable insights can be shared to enhance justice within the SDG framework. By prioritizing environmental justice principles and implementing the recommendations outlined in the article Bangladesh has the potential to make strides toward achieving sustainable development, for all its citizens.

Collaboration and research play a role, in tackling the connection between environmental justice and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to promote a fair and sustainable future, in Bangladesh and other developing nations.

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