



## **ACTIVITY EARTH SUMMIT - 2002**

A four- member delegation from Association for Environment and Human Resource Development(AFEAHRD) attended the 10-day International conference on Sustainable Development concluded in the South African capital, Johannesburg The members of the delegation were Professor Quazi Gulshan Nahar Madina,Joynal Abedin,Abu Mokeram Khondaker and Mahbubur Rashid. A key note paper on "sustainable development:Bangladesh perspective"was presented by Professor Qazi Gulsannahar Madina EC member of the AFEAHRD on August 29 through slide show held at the Ubuntu-Bush Lily,Room-B, allotted for AFEAHRD. The paper was prepared jointly by Dr.Mahbuba Nasreen, Dr.Mokaddem Hossain and Quazi Gushan Nahar Madina. Apart from this, an exhibition was also held at 18,Revonia Avenue in collaboration with "Earth Day Network."

### **Synopsis of the paper presented at the WSSD**

#### **Sustainable Development: Bangladesh Perspective**

The idea of sustainable development has attracted both developed and developing world with very different interests. Now a days the term 'sustainable development' is used over a wide range of contexts: from the world commerce to the realms of social and human welfare in both developed and developing countries. The present paper focuses on some of the issues and problems related to socio-economic, cultural, political, environmental and gender aspects from the view point of both sustainability and unsustainability in Bangladesh.

#### **Land and weather**

Some 84 percent of the population is wholly dependent upon rural landholdings as landlords, owner-operators, tenants, sharecroppers, and as landless laborers. The proportion of rural households that are functionally live below poverty line is about 42 percent. The reasons for increasing number of landless is the increasing control of land by rich farmers; changing social structure; pressure on natural resources due to unequal distribution system; occurrence of frequent natural disasters; introduction of capitalistic structure into agricultural production system.

#### **Agriculture**

The 'Green Revolution' in the late 1060s introduced in Bangladesh as a form of High Yielding seeds, chemical fertilizers and pesticides, large-scale irrigation and mechanization. The new technologies ignored the traditional agricultural practices and were promoted unscrupulous by the industrialized countries as well as large chemical agro businesses, yields increased initially and the Green Revolution was proclaimed as the solution to food insecurity. But later stage farmers realized that they became dependent on the chemical inputs. People feel and see the negative effects of the chemical agriculture on the soil, water, food and in health. Excessive emission of methane gas has been contributing the global warming due to the green house effect.

#### **Deforestation**

According to Forestry Master Plan estimates, about half of the land area controlled by the Forest Department lacks tree cover. The absolute temperature is worsening the livelihood of people. The annual average rainfall is decreasing because of rainless dry season. On the other hand, monsoon rainfall causes heavy landslide, excessive soil erosion, devastating floods and other environmental and socio-economic problems. With the disappearing forests rare wildlife and biological diversity have also reduced quite rapidly.

### **Fisheries**

Bangladesh still holds the world's most diverse and abundant inland fisheries. But on the migration journey to the flood plains and return journey to the safe sanctuaries the fish face many obstructions and hazards, which seriously disturb its reproduction in the open water bodies and ponds. In the name of economic development, fish resources have been indiscriminately exploited and destroyed; and ecocides have taken place in some geographic locations. The local ecology and environment has affected badly due to massive deforestation. A large number of fishermen, small cultivators, poor and destitute women and small traders have lost their livelihood and or have forced to change their means of livelihood.

### **Urbanization**

The natural growth of urban population and migration from rural areas, have led to a large influx of migrants into urban areas. Rural landlessness and subsequent poverty, and shrinking economic and employment opportunities, river erosion, flooding, cyclonic storms and other natural disasters also contribute into this population influx. As a result, a growing number of the urban poor have no legal access to roads, water, sewerage systems, schools, health centers, housing credit etc.

### **Industrialization**

As Bangladesh struggle to restore industries to gainful capacities, pollution problems have crept in. In particular, pollution from solid waste, leather tanning industries, pulp and paper industries, textile industries, electric battery manufacturing industries, credit oil refinery industry, surface treatment for plastic processing, cosmetics and detergents, sundry building materials, mechanical engineering, jute industries, public works, civil engineering and public utilities are more prominent. These kinds of industrial pollution have tremendous negative impact on human health, social and residential environment local ecology and ecosystem.

### **Energy**

Among the energy resources, Bangladesh has a vast deposit of natural gas, some hydro electricity and coal and a large amount of fuel wood, crop residue, cow dung etc. Fifty five percent of the total energy comes from traditional sources and use as domestic purposes. Natural Gas is given the most importance of all the commercial energy resources in Bangladesh. The potential gas reserve in Bangladesh is yet to be known. Most of the discovered gas fields are not fully appraised. An immense fire at the Mgurchhara gas field, caught on June 15, 1997 from an explosion devastated a large part of the forest and several tea gardens in the gas field vicinity.

### **Floods**

Floods are a common phenomenon in Bangladesh and is the main concern of the people, especially people in the rural areas. Severe floods submerge more than 50 percent of the land and damage crops, property, disrupt economic activities and cause loss of lives. The rise of mean sea level due to global warming, deforestation, construction of barrage in the neighboring country, flood protection measures are identified as some of the causes of Bangladesh floods. The exact causes, however, is still remains unknown.

## Gender

The concept 'Gender' is widely discussed in the development discourse in Bangladesh. In the highly stratified society achieving gender equity is far behind than expectation. Women are the poorest of the poor and faced number of problems due to their gender identity. Women in the flood prone, cyclone affected and river erosion areas are more vulnerable. They face acute problems in performing domestic as well as income generating activities. Women and children are also vulnerable due to lack of social services like health care facilities.

## Human rights

In Bangladesh a national commission for human rights is yet to be established. Some of the discriminatory laws are under or yet to be reviewed. Discriminatory laws are mainly imposed on women which is one of the major contributors to their lower status than men. Laws regarding environment protection are still to be introduced to fulfill the demand of civil society to have safe environment as a basic human right.

## Good Governance

Bangladesh has enforced the law for better governance including fair representation of gender in the local government. However, the inter-linkages between local governance, gender and sustainable development are yet to be focused. In fact, good governance needs not only fair representations but also effective participation of gender and subordinated social groups at the policy-making and implementation.

## Suggested Measures

An understanding of the multi-sectoral and interrelated impact of environmental degradation which create vulnerability at national, regional and local level needs to be addressed from short, medium and long term strategies. Development activities should be based on environmental impact assessment and strong measures should be taken to prevent deforestation, unplanned urbanization, industrialization and energy extraction to achieve sustainability. Understanding of the socio-economic mechanisms and the impacts of climate and environmental change and its consequence such as floods, cyclones, river bank erosions and other disasters and to assist equitable balance of response across and between social groups, governmental and non-governmental activities, and between institutions and organizations is crucial. Social development programmes should include programmes for community development, integration of non-governmental organizations, women in development, disaster preparedness framing preventive medicine and health services, maternity and child care, nutrition monitoring and small credit systems. An important aspect of adaptation mechanism is likely to be the degree of decentralization and consequent local accessibility to resources and services. Decentralization is the main factor for good governance which facilitates the adaptation of national programs within various local conditions and changing or unanticipated circumstances, and in local context of cultural, socio-economic and political factors. Linkage between human rights and environmental factors should be effectively established.

**-Contributed by Dr. Mahbuba Nasreen, Associate Professor; Dr. Mokaddem Hossain, Professor, Sociology Department, Dhaka University and Members of AFEAHRD**

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