

Feature

Development

Environment, Poverty and Development in Asia

by Dr M A Momin

ENVIRONMENT is the external conditions and influences affecting the life and development of organisms. The physical world contains lithosphere, hydrosphere, atmosphere and the biosphere. Earth's solid crust down to an average depth of 60 km interior of the globe is included in the lithosphere. Oceans, lakes, rivers, icecaps and other water bodies make hydrosphere. The atmosphere comprises the gaseous envelopes of the planet. The biosphere is the important portion of the physical world where life can exist. The biosphere also includes the living organisms themselves.

Human being is an important component of the environment. Various social groups interact in different ways among themselves and cause productive and non-productive and destructive impacts on the bio-physical environment. Human beings have created an artificial environment which affects all other environmental components including mankind himself. Environment may be grouped into two broad categories. One is socio-economic environment. Another is the natural environment. Natural environment can be looked into as natural environment of a country or natural environment of the globe as a whole.

If we examine the socio-economic environment of Asian countries, it is found that poverty remains a major concern of the region. Here over two billion people live in low-income countries and more than 500 million live in "absolute" poverty (ADB, 1990). Today environmental crisis is acute. It is also multi-faceted encompassing a wide variety of ecological problems. Among the major aspects of environmental degradation are toxic wastes, air and water pollution and contamination, global warming, depletion of the ozone layer, deforestation, desertification, soil erosion, and the loss of plant and animal species. Although these environmental degradations do not have direct and particular impact only on the poor sections of the community, indirectly these aspects may contribute to the poverty situation of a country. Some of them may put serious negative impact on the globe as a whole and as part of the globe each nation will be suffering.

The major concern of the poor people is poverty and its fallout. The problems of the poor are: the lack of jobs for themselves and their growing children, the lack of decent housing, the lack of adequate bus services, the lack of means to buy enough food, medicine and clothes, the lack of access to pure water to drink, lack of seats in the local schools even when free tuition is available. The poor live in the environment of deprivation. The state of deprivation is their socio-economic environment. Poverty and development issues

are associated with environment. That is why Earth Summit popularly known as United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) held in June 1992 in Rio de Janeiro has marked environment as the theme of the Earth Summit. But now the tendency is to keep poverty and development issues aside and concentrate on resource depletion and conservation of the natural environment alone. Preservation of resources and conservation of natural resources are of course important for development of a society. But development in true sense in the poor countries of the Asian region is not possible without development of the poor section of the community. Development must be a process for improvement of the living conditions of the people

blaming only the poor for environmental degradation is not a fair judgement on the matter. There are many other factors related to environmental degradation. The environmental problems discussed here are: (A) Global: (1) greenhouse effect, (2) ozone depletion, (3) marine environment. (B) Asian Aspects: (1) land degradation, (2) water related crisis, (3) natural disasters.

ENVIRONMENT OF POVERTY

In the 1980s Asia emerged as the most dynamic and rapidly growing region in the world. However, poverty remains a major concern in Asia. Nearly half of the world's poor live in South Asia, region that

more than 80 per cent in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Philippines and Vietnam, while it is less than one-third in Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh. There is also considerable disparity in health status among the countries. The life expectancy at birth varies from 50 to 57 years in Laos, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan; around 60 years in countries like India, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand; more than 70 per cent in Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Infant mortality rate per thousand was highest in Nepal and Bangladesh and lowest in Malaysia (14.1 in 1988-89) and Sri Lanka (20.2 in 1987). The infant mortality rates in India, Philippines and Vietnam were 94 in 1988, 52.8 in 1988 and 90.0 in 1988-89.

The distribution pattern of resources among the people determines dimensions of poverty. In the developing countries of Asia, land being the principal resource of the

Source: Momtazuddin Ahmed and Mahabub Hossain, Rural Development Outlook in Asia, A Review of IRD Programmes, CIRDAP, 1991, P-81.

Table 1: Population Below Poverty Line

Countries	Years	% of population below poverty line		
		Rural	Urban	Total
Bangladesh	1983-84	57.0	66.0	58.0
	1985-86	51.0	56.0	51.6
	1988-89	48.0	44.0	na
India	1977-78	51.2	38.2	48.3
	1983-84	40.4	28.1	37.4
Indonesia	1987-88	32.0	25.0	29.2
	1980	29.0	28.4	28.6
	1987	20.1	16.4	17.4
Malaysia	1980-81	27.3	2.5	20.7
	1985-86	24.7	8.2	18.4
Nepal	1987	24.8	8.4	19.4
	1977 (minimum subsistence income)	37.23	16.97	-
	1984-85 (minimum 43.1 subsistence income)	-	19.2	-
Pakistan	1985-86	-	-	27.8
	1989-90	-	-	16.6
Philippines	1985	-	-	59.9
	1988	-	-	49.5
Sri Lanka	1981	-	-	49.0
	1985	-	-	44.0
Vietnam	1980-81	11.20	5.80	10.18
	1985-86	10.50	6.00	9.64
	1988-89	9.44	5.10	8.58

in general and poor people in particular. For improvement of the living standard of the people, growth is essential. But sometimes growth is achieved in ways globally damaging in the longer run. Much of the improvement in the past has been based on the use of increasing amounts of raw materials, energy, chemicals, and synthetics. The creation of pollution, is not adequately accounted for in figuring the costs of production processes. These trends have had unforeseen effects on environment. But the damage of environment is caused not only by the growth or development process. It may happen from the lack of development also. The realization that poor people are often responsible for environmental degradation has been growing in recent years. It is argued that for mere survival poor and hungry people will destroy their immediate environment. They will cut down forests, their livestock will overgraze grasslands, they will overuse marginal land. Because of the poverty situation, poor people will go from the rural areas to the cities in search of employment. But

accounts for roughly 30 per cent of the world's population. The total number of poor in South Asia was estimated at 520 million in 1985 accounting for 51 per cent of the population whereas the number of the extreme poor is about 300 million, accounting for 29 per cent of the population. A number of Asian economies have benefited from industrial programmes and green revolution. East and South East Asia have made impressive strides in respect of equity, especially the countries like the Republic of Korea and Taiwan. Higher agricultural prices and a surge in production narrowed inter sectoral differentials and the dispersion of incomes in the Peoples Republic of China, lowering absolute poverty from 27 per cent of the rural populace in 1979 to under 12 per cent in 1986.

Estimates and changes of absolute poverty situation of some CIRDAP Member Countries (CMCs) during 1980s are given in the Table-1.

Note: Because of different yardsticks for measuring poverty lines,

where the ratio of poverty is less than 20 per cent the improvement is less pronounced. In the rural areas of CIRDAP member countries also poverty situation has improved. But it may be observed that in all CIRDAP member countries in the urban areas the extent of poverty is lower than that in the rural areas.

Other determinants of poverty situation of Asian countries are social indicators e.g. literacy, life expectancy, infant mortality rate etc. In terms of relevant social indicators characterizing poverty in South Asia, the performance of South Asia is below the average for the developing world as a whole. For example, while the infant mortality is 172 per thousand, the average life expectancy is 61 years and net primary school enrolment is 74 per cent, the corresponding averages for the developing world as a whole are 221 per thousand, 62 years and 83 per cent.

Among the Asian countries there are variations in respect of these indicators. For example, CIRDAP member countries have widely different literacy levels. The adult literacy rate is

more than 80 per cent in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Philippines and Vietnam, while it is less than one-third in Nepal, Pakistan and Bangladesh. There is also considerable disparity in health status among the countries. The life expectancy at birth varies from 50 to 57 years in Laos, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan; around 60 years in countries like India, Indonesia, Philippines, Thailand; more than 70 per cent in Sri Lanka and Malaysia. Infant mortality rate per thousand was highest in Nepal and Bangladesh and lowest in Malaysia (14.1 in 1988-89) and Sri Lanka (20.2 in 1987). The infant mortality rates in India, Philippines and Vietnam were 94 in 1988, 52.8 in 1988 and 90.0 in 1988-89.

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Table-2

Extents of Degraded Land for Selected Countries in the Asian Countries

Country	Percentage of Degraded Land Area out of Total Land Area
Bangladesh	7.4
China	30.0
India	49.8
Indonesia	24.0
Laos	35.0
Myanmar	3.2
Pakistan	17.3
Philippines	16.8
Sri Lanka	10.8
Thailand	33.7
Vietnam	48.9

Source: FAO/RAPA, Environment and Agriculture, Bangkok, 1989, p.44.

rural people their poverty situation is very much related with the land distribution pattern. In these countries lack of land and malnutrition is highly correlated.

Malnutrition in Bangladesh among farming households with less than one acre is found four times of the households in the group with more than one acre.

ENVIRONMENTAL CRISIS: SOME ASIAN ASPECTS

There are several environmental problems related mainly with the agrarian economies of the developing countries in general and Asian countries in particular. Majority of the countries in Asia depend on the natural resources for the sustained use of the bio-productive systems of agriculture, forestry and fishery. Major environmental crises faced by Asian countries are: (1) deforestation; (2) land degradation; (3) water related crisis; (4) natural disasters; etc.

Land Degradation

In the field of agriculture land is the major factor of production. The Asia-Pacific re-

gion covers 22.9 per cent of the world's land area. In 1987, the region accounted for 30.9 per cent of the world's arable and permanently cropped land. In 1987, 56.1 per cent of the total population and 72.6 per cent of the agricultural population lived in the region. Land degradation is the process whereby land deteriorates through a reduction in soil depth or quality as a result of the actions of water, wind, gravity and temperature. Land degradation may reduce productivity by its impact on the quality of vegetation which the land supports. Land can be degraded by soil erosion, salinization, alkalinization, water logging and chemical degradation. Desertification takes place if land is degraded permanently in arid and semi-arid areas.

Each year six million hectares of productive dry land turns into worthless desert. Over three decades, this would amount to an area roughly as large as Saudi Arabia. If current systems of land use continue, the total area of high-productivity crop land decreases by 55 million hectares by the year 2000 through toxification and conversion to non-agricultural use. The following table gives an account of degraded land areas of some of the Asian countries

Water Related Crisis

In the globe most of the water is ocean water. A minor proportion of the fresh water is available for human use since most of it is caught in icecaps and glaciers. Still globally there is more than enough water to meet present and future demand. The main problem is the inequitable distribution of water as a result of which it is available in the wrong place at the wrong time or with the wrong quality.

Irrigation is a key input in the field of agricultural development. The necessity of expansion of irrigation facilities is increasingly felt with the rapid agrarian development. The irrigated area in the world in 1980 stood at above 200 million ha., 40 per cent of which occurred in the developing countries.

In the Asian countries migration of rural people to the urban areas in search of employment opportunities is an important phenomenon. It creates acute problem and adds to the urban poverty. In these circumstances, a great number of city-dwellers are bound to live in unsatisfactory conditions with inadequate access to the properly treated water or sanitary facilities.

The people of the poor countries of Asia due to inadequate supply of potable water in many cases become victims of various types of diseases such as cholera, typhoid, dysentery and other infectious diseases.

(This is the first part of a two part feature. For a follow-up see next weeks development page)

Adarsha Gram: Prospects

by Masud Arif

THE Adarsha Gram (Ideal Village) project which was initiated a couple of years ago to rehabilitate the poorest of the poor and to help them by creating employment opportunities, aims at achieving its target of sheltering 200,000 landless and rootless people in 1000 such villages within a short time.

After the end of three phases of the programme recently about 150,000 such people are presently living in 750 Adarsha Grams in different parts of the country.

The number of the rehabilitated family is 28020. Another two phases (phase 4 and phase 5) within the year 1993 envisage to move some 60,000 additional people into 270 such villages.

The Ministry of Land of the Government of Bangladesh is supervising the project with the assistance of the Commission of European Community (CEC).

Bangladesh and the CEC set for realisation six main objectives in 1991 project proforma. The objectives are: First, rehabilitation of rootless, landless families in five years through the establishment of cluster villages on khas lands in an organized way.

Second, providing security and a sense of unity among the settled families.

Third, increasing the agricultural productivity through optimum utilisation of khas lands lying scattered throughout the country.

Fourth, creating employment opportunities for the rehabilitated families through promotion of farming and non-farming activities.

Fifth, helping reduce the rural-urban migration rate by creating self-employment opportunities for the members of the rehabilitated families who would otherwise form part of the floating population in urban slums.



Multicrop use of homestead plots

Meanwhile, some 55 Non Government Organisations (NGO) now have been selected to participate with these Adarsha Grams for operation closely with the thana administration. These NGO's will facilitate community development and income generation offering activities like group formation, handicraft training, horticulture, children's education, literacy programme, health and family planning, pisciculture and marketing.

Steps were taken to establish cluster villages in some char areas in Bangladesh in 1972 as an anti-poverty programme with foreign aid. The programme ended in failure for lack of local interest at that time and only some seven such villages were set up in Noakhali district between the year 1972 and 1987.

In 1988 with the title 'operation Thikana', the anti-poverty programme was again taken up for establishing clustered villages in rural areas.

The aim was to use government-owned land not only for providing habitation for the poor, rural homeless and landless people, but also for assisting them in development sustainable sources of income and employment generation. Later the Government of

Sixth, improving the socio-economic status of the rehabilitated families.

The Promotion, Planning and Monitoring Unit (PPMU) of the Land Ministry which is responsible for the implementation of the Adarsha Gram Project in accordance with the Project Proforma, pointed out some ten attributes of a successful village. They have found out that a good village has a primary school, work or income source, health facilities, family planning programme, agricultural land, credit scheme, clean water, good communication facilities, electricity and cooperatives.

According to PPMU sources, the average Adarsha Gram has 39 families of which 94 males and 87 females, 41 houses, one pond, three acres of agricultural land, one tubewell for every 16 families, 56 children of primary school age of whom 27 attend regularly, 33 children of secondary school age of whom three attend regularly, 12 adults who can read a newspaper, 39 adult males who can work and earn a monthly average of Taka 709, eight adult females who work and earn a monthly average of Taka 349 and has a total area of about 20 acres.

Industrialist Warns of Worker Shortage Because of AIDS

by Leonard Moveneka

MORE apprentices should be recruited by the printing industry in Zimbabwe to replace those who will die from acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS), in the coming years, the Chairman of the Federation of Master Printers (FMP) in Zimbabwe Ellis Smith has suggested. His comment reflects the way Zimbabwean industrialists are increasingly taking AIDS into account in their planning.

"At present AIDS-infected people represent four per cent of the population. This percentage is going to increase to perhaps 25% or even 30% by the year 2000," Smith told the Federation's annual general meeting. He said that failure to train more people would lead to a rapid escalation of wages for a shrinking pool of skilled workers.

The number of AIDS cases in Zimbabwe has risen dramatically from 119 in 1989 to almost 6,000 at the end of 1990. According to the Harare-based AIDS Counselling Trust, 642 people were diagnosed as being infected with the human immunodeficiency virus, HIV, that can lead to AIDS during the first quarter of this year.

Last year Health Minister Dr Timothy Stamps ruled against making AIDS a notifiable disease. Dr Stamps said the only way to fight the disease was for people to change their sexual behaviour. /PANOS

Spreading the Word about Organic Farming

by Winnie Ogana

CHRISTINE Maruru has increased coffee output on her small Kenyan farm by 25% in four years — by stopping use of chemical pesticides and fertiliser.

Instead, she uses compost manure and inter-crops coffee with nitrogen-fixing beans and much-producing potatoes to improve soil fertility, and a herbal insecticide based on onion leaves and Mexican marigold.

She is one of a small number of farmers reaping the benefits of techniques propagated by the Kenya Institute of Organic Farming. The number is small, says the Institute, because Agriculture Ministry extension workers tell farmers that the government does not promote organic farming and that the methods have not been tested scientifically.

Institute Director John Njoroge stresses the importance of insect-repelling plants, composting and "kitchen gardens". The gardens, he says, increase family income and improve nutrition. The particularly benefit women who become less dependent on receiving money from their husbands.

The Institute also promotes traditional food crops which generally have a greater pest resistance than exotic varieties. It works with schools, farmer training colleges, scientific research organisations, women's groups and churches to spread the word about environmentally sound farming. In a secondary school near the town of Nakuru, 360 students, the teachers and their families provide all the vegetables, milk and meat they need from a 10 acre (3.7 hectares) organic farm. /PANOS

Anger Over Plans for the New Beirut

by Allan Thompson from Beirut

of downtown, but wants rights to carry out further excavations.

The irony of a debate over archaeological and urban planning in an area that was a battlefield for 15 years is lost on no one. The shells and bullets of warring sectarian militias has little regard for architecture.

The heart of downtown is Martyr's Square. A memorial to heroes of Lebanon's independence struggle stands in the tattered square, its statue a torch-bearing woman looking out in a frozen stare over ghostly ruins. A statue of a man stands at her side, his arms

"You can't just renovate everything. This is a city, not a museum."

Hariri last year proposed legislation to create a private real estate company that would take over the downtown. Property owners would relinquish ownership and receive shares in the company. Outside investors could then pump

Argument is raging over a multi-billion dollar project to rebuild war-torn Beirut. Ancient architecture stands to be replaced by modern condominiums and office towers. Lebanon Prime Minister Rafic Hariri is at the centre of the debate. The billionaire construction magnate hatched the project before coming to office. Now, with only a few minor concessions to critics, reports Gemini News Service, Hariri is poised to remake Beirut.



Rebuilding lives and cities is Hariri's priority

The Green Line then dividing Beirut into Muslim and Christian sectors tore right through the old downtown, palm-lined squares, an opera house, theatres, cinemas and covered souks dating to Ottoman times.

blown off like the Venus de Milo, bullet holes through his heart.

By the fall of 1991, with the war apparently over, the cash-strapped Lebanese government effectively turned the downtown over to the powerful

make way for new ones.

"We will have some tall buildings here, that is for sure. To be economically viable it has to be that way," said Nasser Chammar, Hariri's representative on the board of directors that will oversee the project.

money into the company up to a level that would match the stake held by original property owners, receiving shares in return.

The plan, although challenged in the courts by some property owners, was approved by parliament last year and the real estate company will be formed as soon as committees can establish the value of the downtown properties.

Many buildings have already been demolished. Hariri's people say it was because they posed a safety hazard. Critics dispute this claim.

Two new 40-storey skyscrapers — taller than anything in Lebanon — would form a world trade centre on the waterfront. A row of 10-storey luxury condominiums would line the shore encircling a new green area built atop a now vacant landfill, made up of rubble pushed into the sea during the war.

Crowded, narrow streets would give way to rows of mid-rise buildings. In all, the downtown would have 30 new buildings of up to 35 stories. Traditional souks, with their arched alleyways, have been deemed beyond restoration. However, the markets would be "re-created" in a modern shopping centre environment.

In original versions of the master plan, chief planner Henri Edde had proposed keeping the famous Martyr's Square as a focal point. But Hariri wanted something different.

If he gets his way, the Martyr's Square will no longer be a square at all, but will be blasted open all the way to the Mediterranean Sea in a grand boulevard meant to rival other national capitals. "Hariri said he wanted it as wide as the Champs Elysees in Paris," one source recounted.

Hariri's critics have not been silenced. Tabet and his group organised seminars last year to debate the plan and leaked to newspapers confidential documents from Beirut's urban planning department, which was critical of the plan.

The group has now published a book documenting Hariri's reconstruction proposal. The book is being serialised by the influential Arabic-language daily, Al-Safir, which said Hariri's rise to the office of prime minister warranted another close look at the plan.

The newspaper's renewed interest was started by the abrupt resignation in October of Edde, the project's chief planner. Edde quit to protest against changes he said would "deform" the plan. The changes were recommended by cabinet to respond to critics by adding more green space on the shoreline landfill area. But Hariri demanded, and received, approval for a corresponding increase in density in the rest of the project to make up for the green space. Building is likely to begin next year, after the real estate company is formally constituted and investors join in. A few hundred metres away, the proud statue in the Martyr's Square continued to hold its torch high its frozen stare may soon be looking at a new Beirut, down a broad boulevard that runs right to the sea. — GEMINI NEWS