

What Lies in Our Power to Do

The progressive flow of bad news about water supply in the metropolis is unnerving. First, it was unquantified scarcity that had made news, but interminably. Then came a hair-raising detail: WASA water was not safe to drink, it had better be drunk after boiling or Chlorinating. This was followed by a can't-help-it-anymore disclosure that everyday half of the city's 8 million dwellers were going without potable water.

Should Dhaka necessarily be condemned to a prolonged water scarcity? We don't think it should be. The supply short-fall can be met at a rate much faster than has been projected in the current plans to alleviate it.

The mitigation strategy we have adopted is reflective of a one-track mind. The Tk 3000 crore Syedabad Water Treatment Plant is scheduled for completion in 2010 AD and not a single brick has been laid on the proposed site as yet.

Our grateful thanks to the French government which has indicated its readiness to fund the crucial phase of setting up the Syedabad plant. For such a huge project we are naturally looking for co-financiers.

Containing the system loss is a much softer option holding as well the key to a sizable easing of the water scarcity. And if the public sector is keen on having its decisive say on the utility rates, its rationale on this score would be strengthened if it were to succeed in arresting the system loss through sheer efficiency.

What a high premium have we to pay now for our failure to timely put a new water treatment plant in place. Even the BMRE of the outdated Chandighat surface water treatment plant, which is to commence in December, with assistance from Japan, is four years too late.

Dismal Thoughts

Yesterday the Education Day passed without any fitting commemoration. It is the students who built this day with their blood way back in 1962. Even the students, with the honourable exception of the dissipated and by now largely inconsequential Bangladesh Chhatra Union, didn't do anything to remind the students themselves of the struggles waged and glories achieved by those who preceded them in the academies.

Independence has done one thing to education. Allocation has gone up and up till it has hit the uppermost perches of the budget figures. But has it meant any desired change in the kind it is being offered these 47 years or any significant improvement in its quality?

On the contrary this most respected zone of our national life — respected for its cleanness of dealings and moral probity and a spirit of dedicated service that informed it — has been wholly commercialised and corrupted to its entrails. Knowledge and skill, mental maturation and acquisition of a will to live for the society — the best values that can accrue from education, have all become very alien concepts to Bangladesh's education.

The rise of tutorials and coaching centres are the best and most dubious distinguishing marks of the present education picture, signifying a definite goodbye to true knowledge and intellectual growth through which alone knowledge can be acquired. But these new-fangled institutions did not evolve all by themselves. Innovations were made in school and college education that invited the birth and prosperity of these.

Govt-NGO Interaction: Some Lessons and Strategies

In recent years the government of Bangladesh has been increasingly interacting with and involving NGOs in its development work. One area which has been of special interest is environment and more particularly the management of natural resources such as land, water, trees, fish and livestock, etc. Over the last few years, different agencies and projects of the government have attempted to involve and engage NGOs in a number of areas pertaining to environment and natural resource management.

NEMAP

National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) is a project of the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MOEF) which it had been carrying out with national and expatriate consultants and UNDP funding for several years. One of the criticisms of the first couple of draft NEMAP documents produced by the consultants was the lack of any really meaningful consultation in their — preparation.

The Ministry of Environment sought the cooperation of the NGO community through the Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB) in developing a consultative process. ADAB in turn referred the matter to the Coalition of Environmental NGOs (CEN) which is affiliated to ADAB and consists of over 200 NGOs working on environment related issues (the CEN also contains non-ADAB NGOs).

Together with the Ministry of Environment, Department of Environment, CEN, ADAB and others such as the Forum of Environmental Journalists and Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies a steering group was formed and there developed a process of consultations and awareness raising involving twenty-three grassroots workshops, six regional workshops, five professional workshops and one national workshop (with the Prime Minister) as well as leaflets, advertisements and a TV, radio and print media campaign.

Although there were occasional hiccups and misunder-

standings between the government and NGO groups along the way, the overall level of cooperation was very high and the entire public consultation phase was successfully completed on schedule within a matter of a few months. This was possible mainly due to the proper working atmosphere of partnership between the MOEF and NGOs.

At the national workshop which culminated the consultative phase, the Prime Minister commended the MOEF and the NGOs for the model of cooperation they had demonstrated in a national cause.

Tree Planting

NGOs have been actively planting trees for many years and it has been one of their most successful activities. They do so on homesteads, beside roads, embankments and railways and in fallow land and in and around forest areas.

The planting of trees on homesteads does not involve any interaction with government (except perhaps to get saplings) and indeed the homestead forest sector is the major contributor of timber and firewood in the country.

However, for tree planting on government land it is necessary to come to some arrangement with the relevant agencies (e.g. Railway Department, Roads and Highway, Local Government or Forestry Department).

by Dr Saleemul Huq

Ministry of Environment and Forest, in dialogue with NGOs, had developed a formula for sharing the products of trees planted by NGO group members. This formula has been successfully used for involving NGOs in other projects such as the Thana Afforestation Project.

The Forest Department has also been working with related NGOs involving the group members in agro forestry activities within forest lands as well as helping the Forest Department project their own forests.

Fisheries

There are two main areas of activity in the inland water fisheries sector for both government and NGOs, namely aquaculture (mostly in ponds) and openwaters (rivers, floodplains, beels and haors). In the aquaculture sector NGOs have been very active for many years and have been promoting aquaculture by their groups for income generation.

The interaction with government has been minimal, except to purchase fingerlings from government hatcheries. The NGOs also have developed their own hatcheries as well as they also buy from the private hatcheries.

Land Resources
Land resources in Bangladesh, particularly government owned khas land has often been a contentious issue. The government has some years back involved NGOs in the Land Management Committee to decide on the distribution of land to genuine landless groups.

The Land Reclamation Project in Noakhali with funding from the Netherlands government also involved an NGO, Nijera Kori, in identifying the genuine landless for settlement on the newly accreted chair lands. This experience was, however, not very happy.

Agriculture

NGOs have been at the forefront of environmentally sound agriculture and horticulture with groups from Proshika and BRAC practising organic farming without pesticides and NGOs like MCC collecting hundreds of local varieties of seeds of fruit and vegetable plants.

gaged in floodplains selected for stocking by the DOF to organize the fishermen in order to prevent catching of the stocked fish while they are still undersized.

Another examples of government NGO cooperation has been in the shrimp sector under World Bank funded projects where CARITAS worked with DOF to organize local landowners to form groups and carry out shrimp farming for themselves rather than to give out their land to outsiders on lease.

Livestock

In the livestock sector, NGOs have been working for many years in helping the groups raise cattle for dairy or meat purposes as income generating activities. The interaction of NGOs with the government through the Department of Livestock is to ensure the delivery of vaccine and other medicines for livestock and poultry.

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forefront of environmentally sound agriculture and horticulture with groups from Proshika and BRAC practising organic farming without pesticides and NGOs like MCC collecting hundreds of local varieties of seeds of fruit and vegetable plants. Most of these works have very little interaction with government agencies, however some initiatives have been taken through various agriculture sector projects to involve NGO particularly in technology extension in horticulture and agriculture.

Projects

A number of major projects in different sectors have tried to involve or interacted with NGOs on their own with both good and bad experiences, some of which are described below.

Jamuna Bridge: This is the biggest infrastructure project in the country at a cost of over US\$ 700 million funded by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank and Japan and as the construction will have environmental as well as socio-economic impacts including the displacement of thousands of people, the Jamuna Bridge Authority with donor support has developed both a resettlement plan and an environmental action plan to mitigate the impacts. It has involved BRAC to carry out the initial survey of project-affected people and is seeking further NGO input in the mitigating strategies.

Flood Action Plan (FAP):

This is one of the most controversial projects of the government with multi-donor support coordinated by the World Bank. The initial study phase of the project involved about US\$ 150 million, mostly for foreign consultants and a decision is due late this year on how to implement the proposed plan.

The NGOs should ensure a genuine sense of participation of the target beneficiaries, particularly the poor, in both project planning and implementation.

The author is executive Director, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, a private, non-profit policy and research institute.

Conclusion

The foregoing has been an attempt to describe (albeit not exhaustively) the different experiences in government-NGO interaction in the area of environment and natural resource management.

The experiences indicate that while it is possible for government and NGOs work together sometimes, at others it is almost impossible as they get entrenched into opposite camps making cooperation difficult. It is probably the right time to take stock of the different types of experiences and develop a modus operandi for government-NGO interaction and collaboration in the field of environment and natural resource management.

1. It is advisable for the government to involve the NGOs from the very beginning of the project design to ensure their active and proper participation.

2. The government should involve the NGOs as genuine partners rather than as simply sub-contractors (like consultants).

3. Since NGOs have their own programmes, ways of operation, target groups and resources, they should be given an opportunity to make suggestions about the entire project design to ensure that the benefits go to the poor.

4. It is probably best in most cases to deal with an apex body of the NGOs like ADAB or CEN for environment and like VHSS for the health sector. They can then involve the relevant member of NGOs in the field.

5. There should be a mechanism for on-going dialogue between the government and NGO body at a higher level to review activities and sort out problems.

6. The NGO organisation and input should be independently monitored and evaluated to ensure that the benefits are actually reaching the poor.

The author is executive Director, Bangladesh Centre for Advanced Studies, a private, non-profit policy and research institute.

China Steps up Efforts to Protect Children

Paul Murphy writes from Beijing

The teenager stands by the side of the road. Displayed on the sidewalk near him is a hand-lettered sign that reads: "Willing to do any kind of work."

Willing to do any kind of work. As he stands shivering in a threadbare jacket in below-freezing weather, he explains that he has just arrived by train from his home in a poor rural area of Shaanxi province, just south of this city, the capital of China.

The teenager's move to this city is illegal: Chinese law requires everyone to have a residence permit.

Discontented farmers have rioted in rural areas of Sichuan and other provinces. Last year, several hundred thousand farmers from Sichuan flocked to Shanghai in search of work.

In the country's more open climate, youth in search of better prospects find it easy to hop on a train. New arrivals can be seen hunched on the ground outside railway stations

in most big cities, their possessions bunched into knapsacks. In Beijing they solicit work all over the city.

The government says China has about 200,000 street children, a very small proportion of the country's 300 million youngsters. Although the country's street-children problem is small compared to the troubles faced by other nations, there are fears that it will grow as China's market reforms gain momentum.

Wang Daming, programme officer in Beijing of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) for children with special needs, says the organisation has been working closely with Chinese authorities for the past couple of years to find ways to help street kids.

Youngsters may see big cities, particularly in the booming southern coastal areas, as money-making meccas, says Mr Wang. But they generally lack skills, and when they arrive they find that money is hard to come by.

Seventy per cent of the children are dropouts from schools," says Mr Wang. "If they can receive training, they

are less likely to go to cities in search of work. Prevention is as important as helping those in trouble."

Governments in Anhui and Hunan provinces are now sponsoring programmes to train rural children. Youngsters aged 10 to 12 years are learning to raise rabbits, chickens and pigs; those 16 and older learn skills, such as shoe-making, needed in rural factories. More than 1,000 children have been trained so far, says Mr Wang.

China ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991. One year later, the country mandated care of children through the Law on the Protection of Minors.

In addition, the government is working to sensitise people to the needs of children. Last year the Chinese National Committee for Care of Children, through a one-hour programme on national television, called on people to help youngsters with special needs.

The objective questions which now form the major part of the SSC examination should be lessened.

What option each side decides to use will depend on its relative preference for the above four outcomes as well as on its assessment of how the other side will behave.

The teaching of English is another important element which, unfortunately, is not given due importance in our education system. It is essential that we spread knowledge of English among the youth.

If we want to enter the street of success, I feel some changes are necessary in the education system of this country. We can only then say that we are ready to face the challenge in the present day competitive world.

I am impressed with the outstanding results that a lot of students acquired in this year's SSC examination. But I am quite disheartened to know that students did not fare as well in the essay part of the examination as they did in the objective section.

Nabeel A Chowdhury Dharmandi R/A Dhaka

To the Editor...

Letters for publication in these columns should be addressed to the Editor and legibly written or typed with double space. For reasons of space, short letters are preferred, and all are subject to editing and cuts. Pseudonyms are accepted. However, all communications must bear the writer's real name, signature and address.

Begumbazar graveyard

Sir, Graveyard, the last mortal resting abode of the human being, is said to be the holiest and the most respected place on earth. It is the place where complete peace, purity and tranquillity is felt.

I regret to bring to the information of the readers that the Dhaka Nawab family grave-

OPINION

The Politics of Brinkmanship — a Game-theoretic Interpretation

Wahiduddin Mahmud

A recent editorial in The Daily Star (This Brinkmanship may Easily Go out of Hand, September 12) has tempted me to interpret the prevailing political crisis in terms of Game Theory — which is a mathematical theory having wide applications in behavioral sciences. Let us think of the on-going confrontation between the government and the opposition as a strategic game in which each side can choose among three options, that is, either to remain unyielding in its present position, or to surrender to the demands of the other side, or to offer a compromise (which the other side may or may not accept).

Depending on how each side will use its options, this game will end in producing any one of the following four alternative outcomes: (a) the government concedes to the opposition's demand for a caretaker government; (b) the opposition gives up its demand in favour of the government's position of holding elections under the present party rule; (c) both sides agree for a compromise solution (say, a national government with representation from various parties according to some agreed formula); and (d) the confrontation, being unresolved, leads to a 'disaster'.

What option each side decides to use will depend on its relative preference for the above four outcomes as well as on its assessment of how the other side will behave. To simplify the analysis, we shall designate the preference pattern of a side as 'totally irremissible' if it prefers a disaster to a compromise; 'partially irremissible' if it prefers a disaster to a surrender; and 'not irremissible' if any other outcome is preferable to a disaster.

A disaster is unavoidable as an outcome of this game under three alternative combinations of the preference patterns of the opposing sides, namely, if both sides are totally irremissible, or if one side is 'totally irremissible' while the other side is only 'partially irremissible' or the vice versa.

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