

UN's Social Summit

In a press briefing on Sunday, the heads of the UN agencies based in Dhaka drew attention to the forthcoming World Social Summit in Copenhagen, and underscored the important role that Bangladesh can play as the chairman of SAARC. We think that the point is well taken. We should seriously look into ways as to how we can make best use of this extremely important summit. A world summit on social issues should attract Bangladesh as few other countries in the world. We need such a summit more than most countries.

Those with the remotest familiarity with the UN system will know that a global gathering is what the member states make of it. For any country to significantly influence the agenda, it needs to prepare far in advance, solicit regional backers of those ideas, participate actively in the preparatory conferences — popularly called Prepcoms — and include capable members in the national delegations. As a single country, it is perhaps a little late for Bangladesh to have any significant influence in determining the agenda. The conference is scheduled to be held in March '95. However, as the UN heads of agency pointed out, as SAARC we may still be able to make a significant impact.

It all depends on how seriously we take this UN summit. Yes we have established working groups and preparatory committees. Much of the enthusiasm is from the non-governmental organisations and it is they who are doing most of the real work. The governmental bodies have so far approached the Social Summit, as they usually do with all such events, as an occasion to trumpet the government's achievements — both real and imaginary. Thus their approach is principally PR oriented, and only secondarily substance driven. This is the basic weakness of the government approach to UN summits. It will be a grave mistake on Bangladesh's part to underestimate the importance of the Copenhagen summit. It will be the first ever UN summit on social issues. We have had similar gatherings on sectoral issues such as education, environment, women, development, etc. But never on the social issues as a whole. It will be a summit which will put a human face to development. However, the question is, are we prepared as a regional group to make the Social Summit relevant to our needs? SAARC's poverty alleviation plan falls very much within the framework of the summit. It will be an excellent opportunity for us to give the plan the international exposure that it deserves and needs. The emphasis on focusing on 'girl child' can be further advanced during the summit. The summit provides an excellent opportunity for SAARC to make its own agenda acquire international support. But can we make the best use of it?

We would like to make a point about selecting capable people to participate in that event. Too often UN delegations from Bangladesh are selected on protocol and party lines. That does not work. The world has become much too competitive and professionalised for such methods of delegate selection to have any impact. In fact in many of the recently held UN world conferences, it was the NGO delegations who saved the day by substantive inputs while the government delegations kept themselves busy with set speeches and protocol events. On this occasion at least, let us make a genuine effort to put our best face forward at Copenhagen. We share the views expressed by the UN agency heads in Dhaka both about the importance of the summit, and the role SAARC can play, and what we can do as its current chairman.

Road Safety is Nobody's Baby

A *padayatra* or march was held in Dhaka on Saturday demanding safer road traffic in the city. A popular film actor is taking a leading role in the recent attempts to bring into national focus this issue of urban road safety, and the *padayatra* is the latest in his strivings. This is a personal cause very close to Mr Ilyas Kanchon's heart — his wife was killed in a road accident — which he is trying to share with others and so to turn it into a cause of the society. We, for one, fill one with this and observe with concern that not many have so far been impelled to join the cause and raise it to a movement of national importance. We feel the *padayatra* should continue to be intermittently held with an evergrowing mass of marchers with more and more of the socially important personalities — writers and lawyers, scientists and educators, actors and politicians, singers and business people — drawn to the phalanx moving to realise a right — and urgent — demand.

Dhaka's roads are not safe first because they were not planned to be so. The main traffic-bearing roads, streets and avenues, not to speak of lanes, are either inherited or improvised. Perhaps not much correctional work can be made to improve roads of either kind, safetywise. What has to be strictly ensured now is that no new road runs as crookedly and irrationally as the old ones.

The roads of new Dhaka, the city north of the old and now nonexistent railway track from Phulbaria that is, are wide enough compared to, say, roads of Calcutta. But this welcome broadness has come to mean very little to the road users. Rickshaws park, filling at places three-fourths of the roadspace, where there are no stands for even a paltry dozen of them. And buses stop in the middle of the road or one abreast of one or two others — choking the whole of the road. Only the other day tens of thousands of hawkers and vendors were thrown out of their jobs to make the footpath free and prevent a spill of pedestrian crowd to the already crowded roads. Go to that maddening joint — Farm Gate — and see the death of a pious wish. The road there is as impassable as ever. Traffic policemen, found always in the area, haven't evidently been told to clear the road of the *khali* rickshaws and to prevent buses from stopping abreast. The whole area has been reduced to a bus and auto-rickshaw station through the jungle of which the moving vehicles must find their way.

The roads need radical action. Before going in for costly flyovers etc or banishing the cycle-rickshaws from the heart of the city — something they cannot and indeed should not — the minders of urban roads and the national transport situation should pass a small test of good intentions. Let them ban the so-called minis from city roads and man city passenger traffic wholly through big buses and double-deckers, fleets of tempos and auto-rickshaws and a zero-growth strength of cycle-rickshaws. A better control on the roadworthiness of all motorised vehicles using the city roads is a must without which protestations and exercises of road safety would lose all meaning. And there is no sign that the authorities even mean to establish such a control effectively.

PEOPLE'S participation in planning has become the new mantra of the development set including government, donors, NGOs and others. However, it means different things to different groups and is an extremely difficult concept to put into practice. Rather than discuss the theoretical basis or criteria of what qualifies or does not qualify as 'genuine people's participation' it may be more instructive to examine examples of planning exercises and how they actually did or did not try to incorporate people's participation in the planning process. Two recent national planning exercises in the area of natural resource and environmental planning, namely the Flood Action Plan (FAP) and National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) offer an interesting study in contrasts in more ways than one.

Flood Action Plan

The Flood Action Plan has just completed its first phase of studies over the last few years and the final report is due soon which will chart the actual plan (and projects) to be implemented in the second phase over the coming years. The method used over the last two years has been a highly structured series of twenty-six studies funded by different multi-lateral and bilateral donors and coordinated by a newly created body specifically for this purpose, namely the Flood Plan Coordination Office (FPCO) as an organ of the Ministry of Water Resources. Each of the donors prepared Terms of Reference for their components using their own expatriate consultants and then hired international consulting companies, mostly engineering firms and mostly from the home countries of the donors. Thus, hundreds of expatriate consultants flooded Gulshan, Baridhara and Banani and with their local associates were the primary beneficiaries of the first phase of FAP at a total cost of over 150 million US dollars. Although there was supposed to have been close coordination between the twenty-six component studies through the FPCO and the

World Bank who coordinated on behalf of the donors, in practice many of the studies were started much later than others and most had very little interaction with each other. Thus for example the regional studies which were supposed to use the Environmental Guidelines produced by the Environment Study Component (FAP 16) never used these guidelines as they were not approved in time. Similarly, the institutional study component (FAP 26) which was one of the critical studies to decide how the plan would be implemented did not even start until most others were near completion. Even more alarming is that some projects (e.g. FAP 20) are going ahead towards implementation even before the study phase of FAP has been completed and the shape of the second phase has been decided. The overall result of the first phase so far is the production of hundreds of extremely disparate reports and far from developing a national water sector plan it has become a series of unconnected projects, very close to the way things were done in the past.

To be sure, the story has not been entirely bad, as some useful data gathering, modelling, flood proofing, geographical information systems and environmental guidelines were produced. But these are extremely paltry outputs considering the total cost. Another positive outcome, largely in response to the critics, was the official adoption of people's participation and environmental impact assessment as integral to plan implementation. However, the actual implementation of these guidelines has been highly questionable in practice so far.

The Guidelines for People's Participation have been prepared by expatriate and local consultants and prescribe a highly structured methodology and tool kit to be followed mechanically without realizing the need for ensuring people's

participation as process and not product. It also focuses on involving people in plan implementation rather than in plan formulation which is in itself contradictory to the notion of participation. It remains to be seen how the guidelines are likely to be put into practice. The evidence (for example in Tangail where the FAP 20 is being implemented) so far leaves much to be desired.

National Environment Management Action Plan

The NEMAP exercise which is being carried out by the Ministry of Environment and Forests, took an entirely different approach. It decided to seek people's opinions prior to developing the plan and to incorporate people's opinions in the plan itself. In doing so the ministry took a pro-active initiative to invite NGOs, academics, journalists, lawyers and donor representatives to form a NEMAP Review Committee to develop and oversee an open and comprehensive process of people's participation. It did not proceed from any pre-set guideline or tool-kit prepared by experts but rather with the assumption that with goodwill and an open attitude suitable methodologies could be developed (within the very real resource and time constraints) to make the process sufficiently participatory. The ministry thus unleashed a process of voluntary participation in the NEMAP process itself which it had not anticipated. The NGOs, academics, lawyers, journalists and TV artists all took up the cause of publicising and giving inputs to the NEMAP process on a purely voluntary basis. Thus, if the true costs of all the voluntary inputs (mostly in kind) from government as well as non-government sources were to be taken into account it would be equal to if not more than the total fund provided by the donor agency (UNDP) which was in any case less than half a million US dollars.

by Dr Saleemul Huq

The actual process of people's participation was ensured through a number of means including twenty-three local level workshops in different ecosystems organized by the NGOs and the government together, six regional workshops and professional workshops for academics, journalists, lawyers, women, industrialists and members of parliament. In addition media campaigns were carried out on TV and radio through advertisements and special programmes and over 100,000 leaflets/questionnaires were distributed requesting people to give their opinions. Thousands of people thus gave their inputs. The opinions given were carefully recorded and incorporated into the final plan which is due to be released in draft for discussion during November 1994. It is, of course, likely that the final NEMAP will still be open to criticism of not having 'enough' or 'genuine' people's participation but what is undeniable is firstly that it is certainly a major step forward in trying to ensure genuine people's participation and secondly that the process itself is the important feature and criticism is part of the process which is to be welcomed rather than opposed. The next step of the process is to ensure people's participation in the implementation and monitoring of the plan itself so that the concept of people's participation remains integral to the entire process from planning to implementation and monitoring.

Some Lessons

Although both the FAP and NEMAP are not yet complete some lessons can be drawn already with respect to how to ensure people's participation in planning particularly in the area of environment and natural resources, such as water.

Involving people in the planning process is not only possible, if done correctly, but can be most beneficial to the planners themselves. This atti-

tude was completely missing in FAP which was done by international and national experts in a highly top-down manner while NEMAP tried to and succeeded in eliciting people's views both about the problems as well as the solutions. It is ironic that an interesting example of a successful attempt at public consultation was in one of the FAP Projects where the consultants were open minded enough to actually go to the local people with their proposed plans for embankments and share their assessment of possible adverse impacts on fisheries and environment. The people actually rejected the plans produced by the engineers.

People, including the illiterate, have very clear views and opinions not only about the problems they face but also about the solutions. Thus the planners have much valuable information to gain by consulting people before even starting the planning process.

Involving people in the planning process need not be either too time consuming or expensive if done correctly (indeed the cost of NEMAP was less than 1% of FAP).

Involving people in the planning gives the plan a much greater chance of acceptance and indeed ownership by the people when it comes to be implemented. This lack of acceptance and ownership is a major handicap that has plagued innumerable water sector projects in the past and may still continue to haunt FAP projects in years to come.

That a 'National Action Plan' like NEMAP or FAP must cater to and have a role for other members of civil society including NGOs, journalists, professionals, elected representatives and the people themselves and not be seen as the prerogative of only the government or only one agency within a ministry. Indeed, one of the problems facing the FAP now is whose baby is it? Since FPCO is an ad hoc body for the

planning phase only and BWDB is the legitimate agency for implementation? But it was unhappiness with BWDB that prompted the creation of FPCO in the first place when FAP began so is the exercise going to prove futile?

That environmental and natural resource planning requires an integrated approach since people do not see problems in isolation but in an integrated manner. Thus for example to consider floods to be a national problem in all parts of the country requiring a nationally integrated 'Flood Action Plan' was inherently a questionable approach when the issue was much more 'water resource management' rather than floods alone. This view has been vindicated by the FAP studies themselves which have identified shortage of water in the dry season as being far more important in the western zone (FAP 2 and 4) than floods. Indeed one of the interesting results of the NEMAP exercise of soliciting people's opinions about their major environmental concerns showed 'water related problems' came sixth after others including health, sanitation, poverty, population and natural hazards.

The process of ensuring people's participation is fundamentally an attitudinal rather than a methodological one. Both FAP as well as NEMAP claimed to ensure people's participation but the major reason for the difference was not so much the different methods used but the very different attitudes of the government agencies concerned.

Conclusion

It would seem that with respect to ensuring people's participation in environment and natural resource planning we have two very useful examples of how it can be done (NEMAP) and how not to do it (FAP). The pertinent question now is can the lessons of NEMAP be applied to FAP?

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The 1994 Drought and Sustaining Foodgrain Selfsufficiency

by Dr Mahabub Hossain

BANGLADESH has experienced dramatic changes in the pattern of rainfall over the last few years. The pre-monsoon rainfall starts early, it rains frequently and heavily during April to June which is abnormal, but there is scanty rainfall during July and August, the normal season of heavy rain. This pattern of rainfall is good for the *aus* crop, but has introduced uncertainty for transplanted *aman* rice, as farmers depend on heavy rains in August for puddling the soil. During 1992 and 1993 the monsoon picked up at the tail end of the transplanting season (late August) and continued till the middle of October. This year, however, the heavy rains came too late in the western part of Bangladesh, and the country experienced the most severe drought in *aman* since independence.

Last week, I visited north-west Bangladesh for an assessment of the impact of the drought. I was accompanied by Dr B A Mustafa of the Bangladesh Rice Research Institute (BRRI) and Dr Lane Wade, an agronomist of the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) who has been working for understanding the drought resistance of the rice crop in Asia. We interviewed a number of agricultural extension officials and stopped at several places to talk to farmers along the main road, from Dinajpur in the north to Jessore in the south. This report is based on our impressions from this field visit.

The drought has had some adverse effect on the area transplanted, but it was localised and not as severe as expected. In areas where severe damage was reported (mostly in the northern part of Dinajpur

and Rangpur region), 3 to 10 per cent of the area could not be transplanted, and in about 30 per cent of the land farmers transplanted late by the middle of September. On the late transplanted area, the crop yield would be reduced by about 30 to 50 per cent as farmers had to go for short duration local varieties. But the crop on the medium and low-level land did not suffer any damage.

All through our route the transplanted *aman* crop in the field looked very good, most areas seemed to be under the semi-dwarf modern varieties (mostly BR-11). Farmers reported that they expect bumper harvest in transplanted *aman* in medium and low-level lands. In the flood prone areas, the deepwater broadcast *aman* crop looked good in the deep-flooded land, but on the shallow flooded land around Natore district the crop is infested with heavy weeds. The cattle was grazing on some of these fields.

The main factor why most farmers could avoid the severe effect of the drought is the large-scale expansion of tubewell irrigation in recent years. In Jessore and Kushtia regions, where the average rainfall is usually low, farmers no longer depend on the monsoon rains for the *aman* crop. They have started growing two modern variety rice crops through full irrigation in the *boro* season and supplementary irrigation in the *aman* season. This system of using supplementary irrigation in *aman* has been gaining ground in the north-west, particularly for bringing under rice cultivation the relatively high level land which does not retain

the rain water. This year farmers used the tubewells for transplanting even the medium level land.

A major constraint to using supplementary irrigation for *aman* cultivation was the system of water pricing. In the *boro* season when the crop is grown under full irrigation, tubewell owners either charge a flat fee for the crop season, or claim a share of the harvest (one-fourth share is common). This system does not suit rice cultivation in the monsoon season since farmers use tubewells only when the rainfall is inadequate. Now, the system has undergone a change to suit the needs of the *aman* season. The tubewell owners charge farmers on the basis of the number of hours they use the machine each time they irrigate the crop. The irrigation charge is Tk 30 per hour if the farmer bears the cost of fuel, and Tk 40 otherwise.

The area covered by a tubewell in the *aman* season is substantially higher than in the *boro* season, as farmers could depend on the rains for additional water. The machine owners also shift the shallow tubewells from one place to another to maximise the irrigation coverage. Where irrigation coverage is more than 40 per cent of the arable land (by the dry season standard, farmers could go for transplantation of the entire *aman* area with the existing irrigation facilities).

Based on the limited information from this 'quick and dirty' field visit, our assessment is that the drought may not reduce the total rice harvest during this *aman* season. There would be a significant loss in production on high lands, but it

would be compensated by bumper harvest in the relatively low-lying land. Also since the depth of flooding from monsoon rains was expected to be low, farmers went for the semi-dwarf modern varieties on low lands that in normal years are cultivated with taller low-yielding traditional varieties.

Past experience shows that in years of drought, the central and southeast regions of Bangladesh (the traditional flood-prone areas) usually have above-normal rice yields.

The drought, however, would have a negative effect on farm incomes. The cost of *aman* cultivation would be substantially higher this season due to two factors. First, the farmers had to bear additional costs on account of irrigation. Even in Kushtia and Jessore where farmers are used to irrigating the *aman* rice, the number of times they irrigate the crop was substantially higher this season. Second, heavy rains and waterlogging of fields help farmers control weeds in the transplanted *aman* crops. Because of inadequate rains during this season, there was heavy weeds in the field and farmers had to go for two to three weeding, which increased the labour cost.

In Dinajpur, farmers reported that the cash cost of *aman* cultivation in this season would be about Tk 3000 per acre, compared to Tk 1000 in normal seasons. The price of fertilizer also went up during the period of peak demand.

Farmers thought at the prevailing paddy price, which varies from Tk 290 to 310 per maund, they might cover the cost of cultivation. But if it

drops to last year's level of Tk 200-220 they would incur a loss. The rice price in Bangladesh at present is about 30 per cent higher than in the international market. A substantial decline in paddy price after the *aman* harvest cannot be ruled out.

Although the foodgrain crisis may have been averted at the national level, the problem may continue at some local levels. Particularly at risk are the areas with a large proportion of high-level land and inadequate irrigation facilities. In these areas, the landless agricultural workers may face loss of employment and lower wages due to the reduction in the *aman* harvest and poor economic conditions of the farmers. The wage rate is already low, varying from Tk 25 to 35 for a day's work. Even in irrigated areas the drought may have hit the small-farmers and sharecroppers more than the large or medium land owners who own irrigation equipment or have better financial capacity to buy water. It is they who waited upto the last moment for the rain to come, and would have the largest proportion of the late transplanted area which will suffer the yield decline.

The open market sales of grains under the public food distribution system has checked the upward trend in rice prices, and has benefited the urban poor and the landless and marginal farmers who are net buyers of rice. The government should continue the drought relief programme and target it to upland areas and to the landless and marginal farmers.

The practice of supplementary irrigation in rainfed rice,

which this drought has induced, may open up new opportunities to Bangladesh for sustaining foodgrain self-sufficiency and achieving crop diversification. Farmers may now explore the possibility of fitting a non-rice crop during the November-January period in the prevailing rice-cropping pattern, as they perceive that through early crop establishment with irrigation, the *aman* rice could be harvested by the end of October.

Exploring this option will be facilitated if BRRI could develop shorter duration (90-100 days) photo-period insensitive high yielding rice varieties which are now grown extensively in Philippines and Vietnam.

Irrigation waters becoming scarce throughout Asia, IRRI scientists are now working to develop varieties suitable for direct seeding method of crop establishment. It will save substantial amount of water now used for puddling the soil for transplanting of seedlings. This new technology will be acceptable to Bangladesh farmers if supplementary irrigation is practiced.

As farmers have better water control, the area under high-yielding varieties in *aman* will increase further, which will raise the average yield and production of *aman* rice. The use of tubewells in the *aman* season will increase their capacity utilisation, and the higher rate of return will induce further private sector investment in irrigation. The increase in rice production on medium and low lands will release more upland area for non-rice crops.

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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.

Death of a trust

Sir, Misfortune came in a big way and struck a respectable family at Lalmatia in a very cruel manner. The family consisted of four members. Suddenly two were gone forever. They had to leave the world without being able to tell anything to anybody and for no particular fault of their own. They were supposed to be in the securest place at their own home, eating, resting and enjoying the prime time of their lives. But who could imagine that death would come through a person none other than their own maid who has been living with them for years? Who could believe that anybody could be killed like the way they were, for no apparent earthly reasons at all? Even if we regard the first in-

cident as an act of impulse, what reason can be attributed to the second one? How a woman could coolly wait after committing one murder, cook and attack somebody from behind when one was eating? Her allegation that she was frequently abused are not believable. If it becomes too much for anybody to bear, he or she can certainly choose to leave the house. Nobody kills brutally for abuse unless the person is mentally imbalanced or a homicidal maniac.

Whatever some newspapers are trying to infer to use this still remains to be a case of gruesome murder by somebody who is cool blooded, did know what she was doing and cannot give any excuse for the harm she has done not only to the family but to the whole

community at large, for she has shaken the trust of people on their household employees. She has cast a shadow of doubt and fear in everybody's mind about residing under the same roof with the domestic servants. People would now think twice to engage someone for work in their houses who otherwise would have a good home to live in and a dependable job.

Once when a housewife of Gulshan was killed by her cook, I suggested to open a cell by the government or by private organisations who would be responsible for supplying household servants after having the medical and mental check-ups. I am sure people will be ready to spend some money for that security.

Unfortunately, no such provision is still available. An organisation, be it government or private, which can be depended upon for supplying household employees who are reliable and trustworthy, is yet to come into being. True that, some organisations are doing business in providing security staff. They can add household

staff also in their lists. Now that two precious lives are lost and God knows how many are awaiting such a predicament, we should think about the formation of such an organisation without delay.

Another simple thinking of mine is that in no way we should loose our temper with anybody. If we do not like someone or somebody's action, it is better not to remain associated with the person in any way.

Munira Khan
Dhaka

Naguib Mahfuz

Sir, Would you please allow me to condemn the ghastly attack made on the life of Nobel laureate in literature Naguib Mahfuz who was stabbed in the neck with a knife on Friday, October 14, 1994 by an unidentified man? The news of this ghastly incident was published on October 15 in The Daily Star.

To die at the ripe age of 83 is not a tragedy as long as one dies gracefully. But murder of

anyone is a gruesome act, irrespective of the motive of the assassins and the age of the victims.

However, it's gratifying that if one knife of the world be assassinated serious injuries in his neck to kill him, another knife of a surgeon saved him through a successful surgery, and I wish his early recovery. He is the pride of the Arabic language being the recipient of the Nobel prize for literature and dear to all of us who have a taste for the finest literary works.

Also, I would like to express my disappointment in the cold attitude of the so-called 'big writers and poets' of Dhaka who did not even better to express simple sympathy or protest such an act on Naguib Mahfuz.

K R Zakhami
Khulna

'Water For Life'

Sir, The main theme of this year's World Food Day 'Water for Life' highlighted the importance of water in producing food for human survival.

The Agriculture and Water Resources Minister Majid-ul-Haq while addressing the inaugural function of a seminar on the World Food Day theme said that: 'Desertification process has already started in the southwestern and northern parts of the country due to unilateral withdrawal of Ganges water by India'.

We sincerely hope that India would allow Bangladesh to enjoy the due share of Ganges water by honouring the theme of this year's World Food Day — 'Water For Life'.

Meanwhile, I would like to mention here one plain and simple fact that men have only a limited control over the nature, whatever has been blessed as natural resources from the above should be shared with everyone peacefully. We sincerely hope that India will also show respect to the neighbourly bonds that exists between us and her and allow Bangladesh to have its rightful share of the Ganges water.

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