

World Environment Day and Our Efforts

by Anthony D' Cruze



Whither Environment: Indiscriminate logging and unchecked silting make depletion only phenomenal. Courtesy — Noazesh Ahmed, Naib Uddin Ahmed: Bangladesh

rate of literacy is very low. Millions are unemployed. Very few of our people have access to modern means of energy like oil and electricity. Hence wood is being substituted for energy while cattle manure is serving the purposes of fuel instead of fertilizer.

The problems are enormous. With its limited resources the government alone cannot tackle such issues. Many non-government organisations hence have come forward to complement government's efforts. Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services (RDRS) is one such NGO. RDRS has been working for poverty alleviation in the 6 districts, 28 thanas and 248 unions in the northern part of Bangladesh for the past 23 years. Over 0.2 million families are its beneficiaries. Side by side its efforts in eradication of poverty, the organisation is also working towards preservation of environment through creation of awareness among the masses. Last year, severe drought hit the entire working area of the organisation. With the British ODA grant RDRS became the pioneer NGO in quickly moving into the area to tackle the situation and help the people.

46,250 devastated families were provided cash for work, 25,500 distressed men and women education, 6,897 families were assisted in home gardening, 50 ponds were re-excavated for fish cultivation, 7,850 families were given credits for multifarious productive purpose.

Drought combined with scarcity of fertilizer, seed and inadequate irrigation is deter-

mined to affect coming harvest resulting in shortage in overall foodgrain production. To cope with this impending crisis RDRS has undertaken a second phase of programmes for the coming three months. This is being implemented from 1st May to the 30th July 1995. The programme includes emergency help to 24,120 devastated families, involving women of 18,520 affected families. The programme also includes healthcare & nutrition assistance to 5,600 poor women and 16,800 children. On the other hand during the excessively harsh winter RDRS distributed winter clothing over 2 million takas.

Over the years RDRS has been constantly working towards building an awareness among its beneficiaries in the use of organic fertilizer gradually reducing dependency on chemical fertilizer for agriculture farming.

RDRS has been one of the leading NGOs in tackling afforestation in the northern Bangladesh and last year the organisation has planted 6,30,000 fruits and timber trees on the both sides of the road including 2,79,000 mulberry trees. Through its programme of ensuring maximum survival of the plantations, RDRS regularly employs 'caretakers' from amongst distressed women of the localities on a three-year period using wheat on a daily wage basis. Presently 3,577 number of poor women are engaged in this task.

As a result of this a number of village-based nurseries have also developed in and around



In Harmony with Nature. Courtesy — RDRS

the entire RDRS working areas. These are not only serving as income generating activities for our beneficiaries but also encouraging the general public in taking initiatives on tree plantation an essential element in global upliftment of environment.

More than hundred ponds have been re-excavated where the group or federation of the poor formed by the organisation are employed in fish-culture.

The organisation also extends its services to the poor mass of 98 sandbars (chars) areas of Kurigram district which is outside its normal operational area. These sandbars seem to be a different world. It is hard for a person to conceive the living condition of the people in these areas and the environment who has never been there. Electric light is still a wonder to these people. The solar energy panel, provided by the organisation, is a blessing of science extended to the char people. The power generated by each solar energy panel is just enough for two fluorescent tube lights and to run one 14" black & white TV. The main purpose of installing this panel in this remote area is to acquaint the people with solar energy production system and its use thereby reducing dependency on electric power, which is rare or non-existent in many rural areas. RDRS' objectivity in introducing the solar panel in this area will be fulfilled once other agencies take cognizance of the need and benefit that it brings to the remote areas people.

The organisation is also encouraging the use of bio-gas as an alternate fuel for cooking. Financial and technical assistance as required in this field is extended. This has generated interest in the people for use of more bio-gas. It is noticeable in different areas, especially in Thakurgaon.

The people are also being encouraged to use tubewell water. The organisation also extends the needed support for installing tubewells. They are being inspired to use slab latrines manufactured by the organisation's trained group members so the area people avoid defecating in the open spaces. As a result, a trend and interest to use latrines has increased dramatically in the minds of the people within the working area.

RDRS believes and assumes as a responsibility to aware the people about environment with the small collection of resources. In doing so, we all need to step forward to assist the government in all its efforts. Only then the celebration of World Environment Day will be more significant and meaningful. The environment thereby of our motherland will be clean and more joyful place of living.

Illicit Drug Crops Damage Economies as well as Environments

by Louise Fenner

USIA Staff Writer

COUNTRIES are generally aware of the environmental problems caused by the cultivation of cocaine and marijuana, but they may fail to recognize that these crops also undermine economic growth and development, says an expert in environmental law.

"The economic impact of black market activities like drug production are severe, and they are negative — not positive," said Robert Housman, senior attorney with the non profit Center for International Environmental Law in Washington and the author of an upcoming book on the social impact of illicit crop production.

The flow of illicit money into a country isn't development and it's not growth," Housman told participants in a WorldNet televised dialogue sponsored by the US Information Agency May 5. The economic returns "are false returns."

For example, "the influx of drug money into Colombia caused the revaluation of the Colombian currency." Although that sounds good, he said, producers of legitimate goods suffered losses "because their products were not longer competitive."

Furthermore, Housman said, "black markets — illegal drug production — make it more difficult to open your markets effectively" and compete internationally. Countries must stimulate investment in capital-producing goods and in education and training "to build a first-class labor force. But it's very difficult to invest when the government has not revenue... Black market activities don't pay taxes."

Furthermore, he said, "if we could dedicate one-tenth of what we will spend this year on controlling drugs and drug-related crime to developmental policies, think of the jobs that could be created. Now that's real growth, not fictional growth."

Asked about glyphosate, a chemical used in eradication of coca, marijuana, and opium poppy as well as for weed control in legitimate agriculture, Housman noted that the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) "classifies it as non-toxic, highly biodegradable, and generally non-toxic for animals as well."

It can cause mild irritation of eyes and skin, but this is easily avoided if workers use protective clothing, according to EPA. The chemicals used in cocaine production, such as sulfuric acid and kerosene "are far more toxic to the environment and humans," Housman said. He added that his family uses glyphosate for weed control in their yard. According to DEA, glyphosate is also used in some marijuana eradication programs in the United States that are operated by the states and partly funded by DEA.

According to the State Department's Bureau for International Narcotics and Law Enforcement Affairs, some 50,000 hectares of Colombian rain forest are currently devoted to coca cultivation. "That is rain forest that is lost for our lifetime, our children's lifetimes, and probably our grandchildren's lifetimes," Housman said.

Environmental havoc also occurs when chemicals and fertilizers used in coca cultivation and cocaine production spill onto the land, and into the river, he said.

In summary, Housman stressed that "if we eliminate illicit crops, we can turn to legal crops and begin a process of sustainable agriculture. We can stop throwing chemicals recklessly on these fields and start moving forward with real development."

Furthermore, "we can start putting money to productive use. You'll see foreign direct investment increase, stability will bring more money to your country, local capital will remain — and then you can move forward with development."

"But you're not going to see that unless we can eliminate the cycle of violence and corruption that occurs with the black market."

Antidumping Duties Rejected

Antidumping duties have been rejected for US imports of stainless steel angles from Japan.

Imposing antidumping duties requires affirmative final determinations both from the Commerce Department that dumping is taking place and from the USITC that the imports are injuring US industry.

— USIS

IPM: The Only Way to Save our Crops and Ourselves

by Aasha Mehreen Amin



Using IPM — a prudent move that will save more crops in the future. Photo credit: Noazesh Ahmed and Naibuddin Ahmed — Bangladesh.

SEMINARS on Integrated Pest Management (IPM) as the one held recently in Dhaka, are certainly an encouraging sign for Bangladesh, one of the many developing countries that has relied on imported chemical pesticides for far too long. The effects of such pesticides are devastating since many of them such as DDT and BHC (benzene hexachloride) contain carcinogens which have such terrible effects as cancer, brain damage, paralysis etc. But pest control being vital to ensure good crops, farmers have had no option but to use these chemicals even though they may have been harmfully affected by them. Moreover, the continued use of pesticides results in creating future generations of insects that develop pesticide resistant genes and so are immune to that particular pesticide. This alarming fact may account for the resurgence of malaria because mosquitoes are resistant to DDT and other insecticides. IPM, therefore could not be mere welcome.

But just what is IPM? According to famous entomologist scientist Robert Van Den Bosch, Integrated Pest Control is simply rational pest control: the fitting together of information decision making criteria, methods and materials natu-

rally occurring pest mortality into effective and redeeming pest-management systems."

An integrated control programme involves six basic elements: (1) man (2) knowledge/information (3) monitoring (4) the setting of action levels and (5) methods and (6) materials.

In his book 'The Pesticide Conspiracy' Bosch states that "integrated control" systems are dynamic, involving continuous information gathering and evaluation which in turn permit flexibility in decision making, alteration of the pathways of action, and variation in the agents used." With the help of information, pesticides, pathogens, parasites and predators, pests are eliminated permanently. Chemical pesticide use does not involve assessment of the crop ecosystem and the dynamic interplay of plant, pest, climate and natural enemies, all of which is taken into account in IPM. The end result of IPM, therefore, is pest control that is both lasting and respectful to the environment.

The first thing that appears synonymous with pest is that most hated insect — mosquitoes which have made life hell for citizens of Bangladesh as well as many other countries. The amount of mosquito coil and insecticide

we use, both of which contain harmful carcinogens, is certainly staggering. What is even more frightening is the fact that often it is seen that even after a 'good' spraying of insecticide the loathsome creatures actually come back to life to torment and continue their vampire-like activities. Is this not a case of insects becoming pesticide resistant? The same is true of other dreaded creatures like the even more repugnant cockroach.

An example of how IPM can be successfully applied to eradicate mosquitoes is a project in Marin County, California that Bosch refers to in his book. Headed by Dr Allen D Telford, the programme involves population monitoring, reduced pesticide use and breeding-place management. The result has been an amazing 90 per cent reduction in spraying and an overall reduction in the mosquito problem. The most dramatic results were in a two-thousand acre wetland which was a major mosquito producer giving both the people and their livestock a hard time, to put it mildly. The marsh was thus dutifully sprayed by deadly parathion aircraft five times a year. Dr Telford and his colleagues realised that it was not the marsh's maze of sloughs and channels which were subject

to tidal flushing but potholes created by dummy bombs dropped during World War II. The potholes were not flushed out when rains came and so retained a lot of stagnant water — the perfect haven for mosquito breeding. A ditching machine was installed to drain out the potholes resulting in a significant reduction of mosquitoes in that area. Parathion is no longer sprayed on the marsh and the mosquito problem has disappeared from nearby communities.

This is just a small example of how IPM can be adopted to control pests in an effective and safe way. Methods such as the one mentioned can be easily applied in Bangladesh. Crops can be protected from damaging pests through IPM methods without wreaking havoc with the environment and people's health.

As the cold facts of the effects of chemical pesticides become known, it is clear that IPM is the only way we can save our crops and ourselves. It does not, for instance, take Spielberg-like genius to envision an earth invaded by giant deadly flies and humonous roaches preying on minuscule humans. "Serve them right," the environmentalists will dryly state (if they are alive that is), for not adopting IPM.

Time of Sands Run out for the Caribbean

Nancy McGuire writes from Grenada

The sandy beaches of the Eastern Caribbean have always been regarded as a free and limitless resource. Not any more. Governments, reports Gemini News Service, are realising that sand-mining is a major cause of erosion.

CARIBBEAN beaches still deliver the sun and sea promised in the tourist brochures, but they can no longer always boast of endless sand.

Beaches are being eroded by natural processes and human activities. The phenomenon has been ignored by governments — falsely confident of a resource that would never run out — but now severe damage has occurred, politically unpopular decisions are required and huge costs look likely.

A decade ago, Telescope Point on Grenada's east coast was a beautiful beach. It has been virtually destroyed. Heavy sand mining, indiscriminate removal of mangroves, strong northeast trade winds and a jetty expansion which damaged the reef have done the job. What remains is uprooted coconut trees, mud and a narrow strip of sand.

Monitoring shows that the beach is eroding by between three and four metres a year. Destruction of the beach has disrupted the habitat of snails, crabs and other creatures, which scientists warn will have a long-term effect on the marine food chain. Telescope was once a nesting ground for leatherback turtles. The largest of the turtle family and now an endangered species, leatherbacks used to return to the point of their birth to nest in the sand. They no longer do so.

About 85 per cent of sand for use in Grenada's construction industry is taken from the island's beaches. There is no monitoring, and regulations controlling which beaches are open for mining are often ignored by residents and government.

Concrete is preferred to wood all over the region, because of its resistance to weather and termites. Traditionally, private citizens have regarded beach sand as freely available for house construction, but in terms of quantity governments have often been the biggest culprits in removing sand for public works projects and filtration systems.

Counter-measures are not always appropriate. Valerie Isaac of the natural resources management unit of the Organisation of Eastern Caribbean States (OECES) recalls a workshop in St. Vincent at which the government's director of planning indicated all beaches

would be closed to sand mining. The result, she says, "was a rush on the beaches — people were stockpiling like crazy."

St. Vincent has now constructed facilities to handle imported sand from Guyana, Dominica and other places. Local sand is taken from a river and also made from pumice, a light volcanic rock.

Such attempts to tackle the problem are part of a response to recommendations by COSALC — Coast and Beach Stability in the Lesser Antilles — working with the OECES.

COSALC was founded by the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) in 1985 after erosion in the eastern Caribbean had become visibly more serious.

It has drawn up recommendations for coastal zone regulation, which "several countries have found helpful. The British Virgin Islands used the regulations to introduce mangrove management, as the extensive mangrove root system play an important part in marine life and in the sustainability of beaches and rivers.

Most sand in the British Virgins is obtained from offshore dredging. Some countries have been slower in finding alternatives. The OECES estimates that regionally 16 per cent of sand consumed is imported, and 20 per cent is taken from local beaches. Restricting removal of beach sand is unpopular because alternatives such as crushed stone from quarries cost money. But in 1992 Montserrat introduced stringent regulations, closing all beaches to sand mining.

Beaches are continually

monitored, and barriers control vehicle access. Construction with quarry sand required remedial work on some new buildings, but the government has kept all but one beach closed to sand mining, and gives training one efficient ways of using quarry sand and avoiding siltation.

In St Lucia, sand for government projects is imported from Trinidad and even from Canada. Sand dredged from offshore is used, and river mouths are open at certain times of the year to local villagers. Pumice is extracted from private mines and crushed.

Beach mining is not the only culprit. Other human causes of erosion include construction of port facilities that interfere with the movement of water and pollution. Tropical storms and the endless pounding of waves have brought about significant long-term changes to the coastlines of the Lesser Antilles islands.

Sea defences are costly and can create new forms of erosion.

Eastern Caribbean governments are gradually realising that halting erosion and rebuilding beaches are complicated and costly challenges.

