

Making Parliamentarians Partners for Prevention and Control

HIV/AIDS

by Tasneem Mosadeq

THE initial response in all the countries to HIV/AIDS was that of denial. It was pushed back as a problem affecting only the homosexuals. But from a few isolated cases among marginalised segments it has now become the pandemic of the century. Young and old even children irrespective of gender, caste, religion, sexual orientation and geographical habitat, are exposed to it. The global status of HIV infection as of 1 January, 1996 portrayed a grim picture of its relentless expansion. An estimated 30.6 million people are infected with HIV worldwide, out of which 27.4 million are adult (men-15.8 and women-11.7) and 3.2 million are children. An estimated 10.4 million people developed AIDS from the beginning of the pandemic until 1 January, 1996.

Since its discovery epidemiologists, sociologists, community and governments have developed various approaches to address the problem that is HIV/AIDS. Innovative methods for awareness, counselling and clinical management were implemented from health perspective. Because HIV is infectious, fatal and has no cure or vaccine for prevention as yet available the complexity of the problem has multiplied in terms of its impact on socio-economic structures.

A significant observation is that AIDS and poverty intrinsically chase each other in a vicious circle. A community's ability to alleviate its poverty is directly affected by AIDS and in

turn poverty increases a community's vulnerability to HIV infection. Therefore, it is evident that HIV/AIDS prevention, control and management is a development issue. At the root of HIV/AIDS spread lies the most personal and private behaviour of individuals. The key factor therefore, for addressing this problem is behavioural change at the personal, family and community level which can only be achieved by creating an environment of empowerment for ensuring the right:

- to seek, receive and impart information
- to freedom from discrimination
- to care and support
- to security of person
- to freedom of opinion and expression
- to share in scientific advancement and its benefit
- to take part in and influencing the government

In some parts of the world AIDS epidemic is maturing while in others it is surfacing. Because of this phenomenal eruptions the epidemic situation is getting worse: from nearly 10 million HIV infections in 1990 to over 27 million in 1996. A further proof of it is that since the beginning of the pandemic the large majority of HIV infections, 93 per cent have occurred in the developing world. The number of HIV infected people in Southeast Asia is now more than three times the total number of infected people in the entire industrialised world.

In this context the vulnera-

bility of Bangladesh to HIV/AIDS because of its geographical proximity to the areas like India, Myanmar and Thailand where it is erupting now with rapid fire spread consequences can no longer be ignored. According to the government endorsed surveillance 83 HIV infected cases have so far been detected in Bangladesh out of which four have resulted in full blown AIDS and eventual death. Although, the figures may look very insignificant compared to the estimated 3 million HIV infected cases in India. Yet the fact that all the factors which contribute to the spread of HIV abound in this country and the infra-structure required to prevent, control and care is almost non-existent gives us an extremely short lease of life.

Bangladesh now has a national policy on STD/HIV/AIDS endorsed by the cabinet. Subsequently, a draft strategic plan for five years for the national AIDS programme was developed. For strengthening it a two-day workshop to review the draft 5-year strategic plan was organised by the Bangladesh AIDS Prevention and Control Programme on 28 and 29 April, 1997. Representatives from NGOs, relevant GOB sectors, multi and bilateral donors and private sectors participated in the session. One of the key elements that emerged from the dialogue and in-depth discussion was the multi-sectoral thrust for effective inter-

vention for the prevention and control of HIV/AIDS in Bangladesh. In this context a presentation was made by ACTIONAID Bangladesh (AAB) in collaboration with Christian Commission for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB) a local organisation.

Finalisation of national strategic plan incorporating relevant feedback from the consensus workshop is under process. We now require concerted, comprehensive and flexible plan of action involving all sectors not only for today but for tomorrow because the effect of HIV/AIDS will become evi-

in both the workshops and actively guided the working session. In his closing speech he reiterated government's commitment for accelerating the country-wide intervention on HIV/AIDS and pledged his Ministry's involvement and support. The interaction among the honourable MPs, activists, private sector participants and media people in the working session was extremely cordial. It was at once noticeable that the law makers were not knowledgeable about HIV/AIDS transmission, prevention, high risk behaviour, care and socio-economic and political impact. But throughout the session they were like eager students trying

NGOs but at the end efforts of these sectors were recognised and the exposure that the workshop provided was unanimously appreciated.

The most important aspect of the workshop was the open and congenial atmosphere where everyone felt at ease to speak about sensitive issues like sexually transmitted diseases, sexual behaviour, high risk behaviour group, social mobilisation and community empowerment. All the MPs agreed that appropriate support in caring for people with AIDS is a priority with the aim to contain the spread. It was encouraging to find that the MPs in their earnestness rose above



Health and Family Welfare Minister Salahuddin Yousuf signing the declaration of "Social Commitment" to work for the prevention of HIV/AIDS as a law maker.

dent then. With this view and to reiterate the multi-sectoral response ACTIONAID Bangladesh (AAB) in collaboration with the Bangladesh AIDS Prevention and Control Programme (BAPCP) supported two workshops organised by the Centre for Advocacy and Social Mobilisation (CASM) for the Honourable Members of Parliament. The theme of the workshop was "Developing Social Commitment With The Law-makers To Control HIV/AIDS".

To enact a policy we require the endorsement of the legislators. And the multi-sectoral approach involving different government and private sectors can become a reality when the representatives of the people are directly involved because they work for the people. They are the pivot around which the community moves. The objective of the workshop was to brain-storm by bridging the gap between the NGOs and the Parliamentarians and identify the areas for future collaboration.

It was with a lot of trepidation that the programme was planned and executed. We were not sure of the response and reaction of the respected Members of Parliament and their participation especially on a sensitive and controversial issue of HIV/AIDS. The two workshops were held in the Pan Pacific Sonargaon Hotel on 27 September and 11 October, 1997, respectively. We were very encouraged to find that the MP participation was 50 per cent.

The Honourable Minister for Health and Family Welfare, Mr Salahuddin Yousuf in spite of his busy schedule participated to learn and assimilate. There were debates which resulted in pro-active feedback.

The highlight of the second workshop was the presentation by the Peer Educators from the SHAKTI project of CARE in the Tangail brother. The peer educators are sex workers of the brothel. The MPs intently absorbed their presentation which focused on their life, their vulnerable position, exploitation, their children and the std/HIV/AIDS prevention programme through condom promotion and linking up of the local power structure.

The response of the MPs to the presentation was humane, compassionate and positive. They agreed that eviction of sex workers was not the solution for addressing HIV/AIDS. Some of them felt that as decision makers they have an obligation to attend to the most neglected, abused and condemned community without becoming judgemental. The presentation of all the working groups emphasized the need that a problem of such immense magnitude must draw national attention and discussion in the parliament but prior to that the legislators must be informed of all the activities that are taking place at the government level.

The law makers expressed their desire to move away from the plush surrounding of a five-star hotel and into the field for realistic intervention. Although, in both the session resentment was voiced towards lack of information flow from sectors involved in intervention and the overbearing role of the

their political affiliation, social dogmas and personal prejudices to accept the changes that were proposed for intervention in the identified core group.

But it was rather disappointing to find virtual absence of representation from the business community. The economic impact of HIV/AIDS will first be felt by the private sector at the micro level. In a few countries of Africa some banks and industries are facing closure due to the increasing mortality rate because of AIDS. Therefore, the business community here must not feel complacent that it is not their problem. They must be aware that HIV/AIDS prevalence is highest among the 15 to 45 years age group which is the most productive period in an individual's life. The accompanying cost of HIV/AIDS in terms of absenteeism, lower productivity, depletion of skilled manpower, high staff turn over and health insurance will create tremendous pressure on the private enterprises with a spill over effect on the macro economy of the country.

However, the bottomline is that the MPs as people's representatives work for the people, the NGOs work in the community with the people and the government as the caretaker of the democratic system is established by the people so where is the room for any disparity? We must join hands to combat against the scourge of HIV/AIDS.

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Causes of Fish Mortality

Syed Arif Mustafa Al-Arabi

RECENTLY two items had drawn my attention. One was published on July 16 titled "Toxic pesticides being imported to 'safty' ban order by Shehab Ahmed and Inam Ahmed" and the other published the following day titled as "Terrible Circumvention".

As a conscious citizen as well as responsible government officer of my country I feel it is my duty to uncover the TRUE story.

It is very nice to hear that pyrethroid pesticides are now banned in Bangladesh. But still somebody trying to find out some hole to market it in different brand names which is unfortunately. In 1990-91, I raised this issue first that Ripcord, Cymbush and Decis are extremely toxic to fish in laboratory condition. I should mention that I was the Principal Investigator of Fish Toxicity Project at Riverine Station, FRI Chandpur (1988-94) and was a nominated expert member in (PTASC) Pesticide Technical Advisory Sub-Committee (1989-1994) from FRI as well as Ministry of Fisheries.

Initially nobody put into ear to my argument, but later when I showed some of my laboratory results, the committee was convinced. But the multi-national companies protested and they asked me through PTASC to carry out field trial which was almost impossible to carry out at that moment owing to lack of trained extra-manpower and financial limitations. And the PTASC allowed them to market synthetic pyrethroids until my field results come out. In fact, initially these pesticides were registered against Cotton Boll Worm and at that time the pesticide companies had managed to convince the then Dept of Fisheries people (that time, FRI was not established and Chandpur Freshwater Station was a part of DOP) to consider these pesticides for registration, mentioning as these will be applied only on upland crop like cotton. But later, they silently extended their label of application to use these on other crops like vegetables, tea, wheat, rice etc., very tactfully without prior consent of Dept of Fisheries.

In 1992 and 1993 we conducted some field trials with some locally available synthetic pyrethroid in FRI, Chandpur and the results were very good. Actually, there is no debate that pyrethroids are short persistent pesticides (from different literatures), but extremely toxic to fish if it comes in contact with water. From our field trial result, it showed that fish mortality if it rains or artificially showered which subsequently wash some portion of the pesticides even after 72 hours after spraying or broadcasting. Bangladesh has a lengthy rainy season and it rains any time of the year which washes out these pesticides in low-lying waterbodies, ponds, lakes, canals etc. and causes fish mortality.

One Mr M A Jalil, Director of Krishi Rashayan had wrote several letters and articles also on this issue in "The Bangladesh Observer" at that time. When I placed these results to PTASC, there was none to dispute. And our committee forwarded it to PTASC headed by Secretary, Ministry of Agriculture (then Mr A N M Yusuf was in charge)

to put restriction in marketing of pyrethroid pesticides. At this stage, some pesticide companies tried to purchase me and stop my voice which I boldly refused. But this time popular TV face Mr Shaikh Shiraz has telecast my two interviews in a weekly agricultural magazine programme "Mati O Manush" and Open University programme "BOU" and BTV re-telecast this interview twice within six months.

Basically, it was for public awareness as well as forecasting the effects on aquatic biota. Now some companies have become so arrogant that they threatened me. We were asked by the Secretary to explain why we agreed to stop ban on these group of pesticides and we explained the reason in two/three consecutive PTAC meetings. But still the multi-national companies disagreed this decision. They put another question, we didn't follow the Fish Toxicity Test Protocol properly. At this time we formulated a new protocol for pesticide toxicity test, which has accepted now as National Fish Toxicity Test Protocol. The last year protocol was adopted in 1970 and modified slightly in 1974 (probably, but fortunately I followed the FAO, EPA OCED guidelines all through. And I designed the Fish Toxicity Protocol with respect to our climate and resources. Fortunately it was accepted unanimously in PTAC meeting and subsequently the government banned pyrethroid pesticides.

I think FRI has recommended this issue timely and the future studies should focus on the level of effects on the biology of fish, may be up to molecular or cellular level and it is no more very important to carry out so-called "Broad Based Research" like field trials with different doses again. It is very time-consuming and labour-intensive. As it will be difficult to motivate our illiterate farmers that they should confined their use of pyrethroids within non-rice crops, so it should be banned. They can't check their emotions when pest outbreak occurs. They only search which pesticide can control pest infestation immediately ignoring the other health or environmental hazards.

If Agricultural Extension Workers (Block Supervisors or PPI) can guarantee that they will control the use of pyrethroids within non-cereal crops by their physical presence during pesticide applications, only then it may be considered to use pyrethroids until we can select other suitable alternative to combat some specific pests like Cotton Boll Worm. But it's not easy to carry out in field level. This is true that for mosquito control and other public health purpose deltamethrin group plays a vital role (especially for producing mosquito coils, aerosol etc.). It cannot be replaced immediately until we can find a suitable alternative. So, it may be permitted to import deltamethrin a certain quantity for producing public health items only which must be handled by the skilled personnel of that specific companies.

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"Lessons without Borders"

by Mahbubul Alam

IT is 8:30 in the morning. Nasirabad, an industrial neighbourhood of Chittagong has not yet sprung into action. People are coming in ones and twos to work in rolling mills, engineering workshops and various kind of factories. In the middle of these buildings, there is a 25x12 tin roofed house with bamboo partitions. From the surroundings, it could easily be mistaken for another structure producing piecework for a

school. But one does not wear the boots of metal, but their young voices. The sound of nursery rhymes and multiplication tables. This is a school with a difference. Shimoal, Palash, Swapan and Nasima study here. They and their classmates are the sons and daughters of mill workers, bullockers, mill workers and household maids. These 8 to 10-year-old boys and girls (some look younger due to malnutrition) are studying the syllabus of class two. They are older than their class compared to the students in government primary schools. They may be late in joining school, but they do not lack advantage. Shimoal wants to become a doctor, Palash wants to be an engineer, Nasima boy wants to be an engineer. They spoke to a group of American community development activists who came to visit their school on September 24, as a part of a United States Agency for International Development (USAID) sponsored programme, "Lessons without Borders".

The members of the group were Maxine Reed Vance of Healthy Start, Kate Goddard of Women Entrepreneurs of Baltimore, Tanya Johnson of Project HEAL, Joan Whitaker of Action for Boston Community Development, and Kathryn Tulenko of the Chesapeake Health Plan Foundation. They arrived in Bangladesh on September 19 to learn from Bangladesh's experience in development activities and to see if any of these activities could be replicated in the US. They were especially interested to see non-formal approaches to provide education to the children of disadvantaged sections of society.

The school at Nasirabad is one of 314 similar institutions in the Chittagong area, 34,000 all over the country, run by BRAC, one of the largest non-govern-

mental organizations in Bangladesh. Students in these schools learn Bangla, English, mathematics, social studies and environmental awareness in a three-year course. After completion of the programme, they are eligible for enrollment in class five in government primary schools.

At the school, there are no benches for the students nor a chair for the teacher. Students sat in a 'U' pattern on a floor covered with mats and the teacher gave lessons standing in the middle. The American delegation from the community development organizations sat on the floor and talked with the students and the teacher. The visitors wanted to know why these boys and girls did not go to government schools and wanted to learn the advantages of the non-formal schools. Mr Rafiqur Rahman, Area Manager of BRAC, told them that these schools supplement government institutions. Some of these children of low-income parents were not permitted to go to schools when they came of age or age or dropped out for economic reasons. One advantage of the non-formal schools is their flexibility in class hours. Classes are held in two shifts, one in 8:30 in the morning and another in 12:30. Teacher Daisy Akhtar said that a committee of the parents and the teacher fixes the timing of the session considering other demands on children to work at home or in the fields.

BRAC's Non-Formal Primary Education (NFPE) began in 1985 in response to a demand for schools which suit the needs of the poorest of the poor. USAID provided 600 million taka through the Bangladesh government for the three financial years beginning 1996-97 for the Non-formal and Adult Literacy Programme, of which 100 million taka has already been spent in the last financial year. More than a million students are now enrolled in these schools throughout the country.

The visiting delegation of American community development workers wanted to know how many BRAC school graduates joined the government schools. The teacher said that they expected 80 per cent of

them to join. She said, "The reputation of BRAC schools is so high that their graduates do not need to appear at the entrance examination. Many of the graduates even get government scholarships on a merit basis."

A member of the delegation asked about the student attendance. The teacher said that the attendance was near 100 per cent. Mrs Akhtar said, "If a student remains absent, the school committee enquires and even goes to his or her home to know the cause. This ensures the attendance of the students."

The Americans asked the student about their favourite subjects. After Bangla, learning about the environment and social studies seemed to be popular among them. They also liked learning English.

In addition to teaching these subjects, physical exercise, singing, drawing, dancing, games and story book reading are also used to stimulate the creative thinking processes of the students.

At the end of their visit of Bangladesh, the American delegation met together to exchange their experiences and opinions about the development projects they saw in Bangladesh. At the meeting, Joan Whitaker of Action of Boston Community Development said that she was impressed with the integration of child care and family planning. Kathryn Tulenko of Chesapeake Health Plan Foundation said that the way Grameen Trust (which they also visited) utilizes its resources gave her an idea as to how their funds could be utilized in a better way. She was surprised to know that Grameen Bank has a branch in her area of the United States and planned to contact the branch. She said, "The other thing struck me was that the organizations were well prepared. We're also having foreign visitors soon. We will be prepared in the same way." Tanya Johnson said, "I learned about the relationship between health and economic productivity. When women are empowered, child health improves." She further said that she was pleased to see efforts to involve poor men.

"When men are better off, relationships improve. One thing we have totally forgotten is the role of the rural woman in the US. I think this trip was a blessing for me."

—USIS

GLOBAL CLIMATE CHANGE NEGOTIATIONS

How Should the Developing Countries Respond

by Adil Najam

EARLY this month, a very significant meeting was held in Washington, D.C. It was a meeting that policymakers in the developing countries (the South) should take close note of because it could ultimately have serious impacts on their future.

The all-day meeting was called by the White House as a preparatory step towards the formulation of the U.S. negotiating position for the forthcoming climate change negotiations to be held in Japan later this

year. The meeting could possibly not have had a higher profile. It was actively chaired by President Bill Clinton and Vice President Al Gore and had half their cabinet in attendance. The four panels included the leading lights of the U.S. academia, corporations and labour movement with presentations from key policy players including the secretaries of State, Energy and the Treasury. However, the meeting was significant not simply because of who was there or the high level of policy concern that climate change is generating—at least from a developing country perspective—because it seemed to spell a new direction in U.S. policy towards them.

Despite the blurred rhetoric of the meeting, the message seemed to be that for the industrialized world (the North) to be able to do anything on climate change, the South would also have to do its "share". Although the exact magnitude of this share was never laid out, it was very obvious that the U.S. will look unfavourably at any treaty that does not spell out binding emission restrictions for the developing countries.

What this means is the unravelling of the finely crafted principle of "shared but differentiated responsibility" in international environmental policy. If this turns out to be so, it would mean that developing countries would be asked to make "similar" if not the same percentage emission cuts. This, despite the fact that the historical and current responsibility for carbon emissions lies squarely with the North (80 per cent of the emissions come from the 20 per cent of the world population living in the North). Moreover, this will contradict the so-called "Berlin Mandate" of 1995 (which the U.S. signed) which promises that South will NOT be asked to forfeit its development aspirations in the name of global warming.

Given how closely carbon emissions are linked to energy,

doing anything to significantly combat global warming cannot possibly be cheap. For the U.S. (which produces 22 per cent of all emissions) the cost could run into hundreds of billions of dollars; even for developing countries which contribute a fraction thereof, the cost would be mammoth enough to put their entire economy in disarray. While the urgency of doing something is very real, the poor of the developing world cannot afford to pay the environmental bills of the industrialized rich. At this critical juncture in

face of it the scheme seems to have merit: the rich are able to buy cheaper abatement, and the poor get much needed resources. However, for the South it has many problems: it is akin to the medieval notion "buying indulgences" by paying gold to have your sins absolved; it provides little incentive for changes in consumption; it does not penalize bad behavior; it overlooks sovereignty considerations; and, finally, it ignores the long-term: what will happen when the efficiency gains dry up (which will happen soon enough) or as developing actually develop.

1990 numbers for both population and emissions could be used to keep the calculations fair for high emitting as well as high population countries

the negotiations, it is vital that policy makers in the South recognize this not-so-subtle shift in U.S. policy, understand its dire implications, and develop a concerted strategy to respond to it.

To be effective, any Southern strategy will have to dispel two common perceptions: first, that the developing countries are not really interested in the environment and, second, that they are merely using it as a new ploy for begging for money from the rich. This means that the developing countries need a strategy that a) is proactive in that it clearly states that they are interested in solving the issue and suggests concrete ways of doing so, and b) uses a principled stand instead of the begging bowl to further their developmental interests.

One such strategy could be to throw the proposals coming from the North back at them. To be specific, the proposal that the U.S. and many European powers seem to favour calls for an "emissions trading scheme" merged with "joint implementation." The general idea is to devise a semi-voluntary trading scheme, based on current net emissions, allowing the rich to invest in poor countries to get "good behavior" credit. On the

The developing countries should do better than just raise these concerns. They should turn them around and suggest their own counter-proposal. This is what the South should say to the North. We think a trading scheme is a good idea and are willing to go along with it as long as it is based not on half-baked notions of joint implementation and voluntary arrangements but on the firmer grounds of a principle of "per capita pollution rights". If, indeed, the atmosphere is a global common then every individual—whether from the rich North or the poor South—should have equal rights over its use and equal responsibilities for its upkeep. Let us, then, give property rights to the atmosphere to the citizens of the world. Let us determine the average level of emission per person that the atmosphere can sustain and designate that as the per capita pollution right to be managed by the individual's country. Those who emit more than this would be required to "buy" pollution space from those who emit less than their quota. 1990 numbers for both population and emissions could be used to keep the calculations fair for high emitting as well as high population countries.

There are many advantages to such a proposal. First, such a scheme sends the right messages to both North and South, encouraging the first to reduce emissions and the later to keep them low. Second, it is based on moral principle rather than on an arbitrary allocation. Third, instead of turning developing countries into beggars it places them on an equal footing with the industrialized nations giving them the exact same rights and responsibilities. Fourth, it provides a viable mechanism for debt relief for the poorest countries. Fifth, it is based on a market instrument and meshes with the ideological template of our times. Sixth, it can bypass the sovereignty nightmare because countries are free to raise and spend the monies as they like. Finally, it is long-term in character: once established it can maintain itself until it dies out when all countries reach emissions that are at or below their per capita quotas.

The idea itself is not new. However, it is an idea whose time has finally come. Substantively, this has always been the best option for the South. Strategically, there are at least two reasons why this is the right time for the South to put forth this proposal. First, having themselves called for a trading scheme, the North cannot simply dismiss a proposal which is based on the exact same principle. Second, there could possibly be no better response to the new policy vibes coming from the Washington. They are criticizing the South for not fulfilling its environmental responsibility; this can be the South's way of retorting back. "OK, if you want 'equal' we will give you equal—but equal means equal... in responsibility AS WELL AS RIGHTS."

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