

Protecting the Environment

NEMAP is a Marvel But it's Magic Could Fade

After seven years of deliberation and delays, NEMAP is now a reality. But how sustainable is the plan? Quamrul Islam Chowdhury writes

BA NGLADESH'S National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) has entered into its implementation phase after two years of hop-steps over the fate of its follow-up action Sustainable Environment Programme (SEMP). All decks have recently been cleared to kick off SEM. But the cloud is yet to clear. The million dollar question now is: will this unique programme be successful in making some dent in the labyrinth of unsustainable management of our fragile environment?

Hurrah! finally, we have won the battle, was the instant reaction of Rasheda K Chowdhury who was once ADAB's most dynamic director and currently director of CAMPE. She came on behalf of her agency to sign the letter of agreement with the Ministry of Environment and Forest in presence of Environment Minister Syeda Sajeda Chowdhury, who at long last gave the go-ahead signal to execute the 26 million US dollar Sustainable Environment Management Programme (SEMP) on August 18, 1998. ADAB Director Shamsul Huda felt that Bangladesh civil society bodies could make a breakthrough in changing the whole mindset of a section of the powerful bureaucracy to work together with the private sector under the same umbrella programme for curbing environmental degradation. But, any layman can say, Bangladesh has to go many more miles to reach the green highway of sustainable environment and those who write the nation's fate by taking decisions are yet to give you any space along his side. Again SEM is a glaring example.

Weathered in the troubled waters during the formulation phase of NEMAP and SEM, Rasheda's ever smiling face faded within couple of days. She was not alone, 22 different ministries, departments and civil society bodies saw the fury with red. Even after signing of letters of agreement with 22 different ministries, divisions and civil society bodies on August 18, 1998 the programme couldn't take off as some others in the officedom pointed at some clerical errors and snatched away another four months to just release the first quarter fund which was lying with the UNDP for over a year. Since the pre-formulation phase of SEM, the deterring forces have been active. Old habits die hard. The officedom is still raising silly questions, like prior to the appointment of a full-time National Programme Director, how can a part-time NPD release funds in favour of the different sub-implementing agencies?

Background Bangladesh prepared the National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) in 1996 after five years of massive consultation across the country involving people from all walks of life. In the post-Rio era, NEMAP is the first people's participatory bottom-up environmental planning exercise in the world. NEMAP has been replicated in some other countries. NEMAP is a trend-setting planning document which

paints the vision of the common men, their problems in their own words, probable solutions they thought would improve the quality of their environment and life.

NEMAP embodies the first ever participatory environmental plan prepared by the people under the stewardship of Ministry of Environment and Forest through consultation with farmers, weavers, small traders, fisherfolk, village women, children to professionals, academicians, government officials, policy-makers. The civil society played an

important role in crafting the NEMAP by organising series of grassroots and national workshops during its five year formulation phase beginning in 1991. The NEMAP approach has dramatically changed the conventional planning approach replacing it with a set of interactive consultative peoples participatory bottom-up approach.



Waiting for NEMAP to deliver

Photo: Zahedul Khan

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During the NEMAP formulation phase the people at the grassroots seized the opportunity and dictated the proceedings and literally wrote the NEMAP documents. The consultants took the back seats. And what was more interesting that Bangladesh didn't use a

perceptions. And of course, there is also an end of it. NEMAP took five years to see the daylight. It's the victory for those who worked relentlessly to make NEMAP and SEM a success.

The marvel of the SEM is that a wide array of partnership is expected to strengthen the government efforts to alleviate poverty through the adoption of environment-friendly measures leading to sustainable resource use and management along with sustainable human development in the country.

While explaining the programme, UNDP Resident Representative David E Lockwood

said UNDP has provided 26 million US dollar for funding SEM under its new programme approach in place of earlier project approach. The development agencies in Bangladesh representing NGOs, private sector and professional organisations and government who deal with major environmental issues have united under a single umbrella national programme to address national environmental objectives including empowering the poor by ensuring more access to environmental resources and enhancing capacity for community environmental decision-making, he added. Developing the capacity of the poor to become efficient environment managers and monitor environmental degradation at community level, is a major area SEM is looking into, Lockwood said.

Dr Mahfuzul Haque who drafted SEM and currently SEM Programme Coordinator outlined its five major areas of interventions as people's priorities in NEMAP for implementation in the country: policy and institutions, participatory eco-system management at grassroots level, community based environmental sanitation, advocacy and awareness and training and education.

No Magic Lamp

The SEM is not a miracle, nor it's a magic lamp. It's an ambitious programme. But, it has a number of fault-lines, too. More so, SEM addresses mostly the greener issues of the fragile environment. The brown side is glossed over. That will be dealt by the World Bank. Most of the greener issues are not adequately covered in the programme. There is also a scaling problem. Most of the SEM interventions are of pilot in nature. The size of those interventions are also very small. Given the budget, if you split it into five years time horizon, the intervention resource seems to be a pie nut compared to the magnitude of the problem.

Some of the ministries, divisions and departments of the government have been chosen as sub-implementing agencies of the programme. But, most of the relevant ministries and departments couldn't get a chance to incorporate their actions mainly because of 26 million US dollar budget limit. Some of the best civil society bodies with proven track record have been selected as SIAs. But the rest have been left out for some other programmes. Even each of the SIAs are not given adequate budgetary resources to do the long task. The chosen SIAs are not given any allocation for the task of capacity building for the government efforts to alleviate poverty through the adoption of environment-friendly measures leading to sustainable resource use and management along with sustainable human development in the country.

Landmine Inside SEM

Most interestingly, the World Bank has been awarded the task of capacity building for the government efforts to alleviate poverty through the adoption of environment-friendly measures leading to sustainable resource use and management along with sustainable human development in the country.

itself is a breakthrough.

Bangladesh must live with flood. It's a way of life. People are mentally prepared. It's unique. Floods have positive aspects too. What you can do is to offset effects of flooding. Poorer people are the worst hit by floods. Their income erosion raises the number of people below the poverty line. Alternative sources of income should be created to solve the problem of the poorer people. Diversification of agriculture is important. Fisheries and livestock sectors should receive more priority. Poorer people could get enough income, quick return to compensate their income losses in such a way. Design your projects considering the disaster-proneness as Bangladesh environment is a very fragile one. So that people could think in their own to return to normal life easily and quickly.

It should be addressed in a structured way to protect people's assets. Community level thinking should be promoted to get back to normalcy. Investment is necessary in modern sector of the economy, which can shrug off the adverse effects of disaster quickly.

Arsenic contamination across the country is another issue of grave nature. The government declared emergency on arsenic contamination of ground water in 1996. UNDP responded through 1.7 million US dollar emergency programme in 1997 under Health Ministry. The programme involves water quality testing to determine level of arsenic contamination, identification and marking tubewells to indicate degree of contamination, identification of patients and primary treatment, awareness raising and testing of alternative technologies. The programme upscaled from initial 200 villages to 400 villages in the on-going second phase.

UNDP is trying to support Bangladesh for increasing her capacity of environment management through numbers of environment projects and programmes, say, SEM. The GEF being tapped into for additional funds coming for some of the components of SEM, say, renewable rural energy project and wetland biodiversity project. We are assisting the government in Coastal and Wetland Biodiversity Management through preparation of a 3 million dollar project. Climate change issues are to be addressed through renewable energy, energy efficient lighting, and conversion of 2-stroke to 4-stroke engines, solar energy, GEF missions regularly coming to brief government agencies, NGOs, private sector to explain criteria for GEF funding and accessing mechanism.

ments. The people, the grass-roots and the civil society rejected that. NEMAP turns into a model because it is founded on the village consensus. Comilla Consensus and Dhaka Consensus centre round NEMAP. Dejected WB has now entered in this NEMAP follow-up action. Greens see red in it. The NEMAP has been cited across the globe as a model of participatory environmental planning. That NEMAP spirit is missing in the Washington Consensus.

How WB will ensure massive consultation with stakeholders and cross section of people? Its whole mindset is quite different. Its ethos are non-NEMAP, non-SEMP. It's Latin to Bangladesh village. Can WB help in formulation of environmental legislation ensuring the interests of Bangladesh people? Can they analyze policies from a Bangladesh perspective? If one gives a hard look at the budget earmarked for WB, one would find that 40 per cent of this component allocation would drain down in the name of foreign consultant. More than 1.5 million dollar WB alone is going to spend to hire foreigners who are not familiar with Bangladesh environment. This entire amount can be utilised for some other intervention areas for upscaling the programme. The marvel of both NEMAP and SEM foundation is that during their formulation, Bangladesh didn't use a single foreign consultant. A very few national consultants were involved. Some of them gave their time and knowledge without taking any remuneration. That's the NEMAP spirit. The Environment and Forest Ministry, which is a trend-setter in mobilising civil society bodies in almost all its programmes and steered NEMAP, should have kept this component of the programme in its own hand.

MOEF should now give a hard look at this component. Because, here lies the landmine to tatter the entire beautiful programme SEM. How that danger be overcome is a million dollar question. The success of this majestic programme may run into the risk of blazing inferno of bad legislation and worst policy. The achievements of the whole programme and hard works of all the SIAs may be lost because of WB's wrong policy prescriptions dictated by the Washington Consensus, instead of Village Consensus or Dhaka Consensus.

The biggest challenge now ahead of all the implementing agencies is to develop the best execution skill built on their proven track record of achievements in their respective field of environment management so that the implementation phase of SEM can pass all tests to fulfil the dream of the environmentalists. So that dream of Shefal Begum one day comes true. During the formulation workshop in Comilla NEMAP architects promised her that her visions and priorities would be reflected in NEMAP. Reaching Comilla Consensus, she saw that her words, her vision were in the dream. What now remains to be done is to translate her dreams into reality by executing SEM properly.

Along with Shefal 120 million people of Bangladesh have to go miles ahead to ensure a clean and safe environment and achieve sustainable development for facing the challenges of 21st century. Shefal and Rasheda are the symbols of Bangladesh. They have given NEMAP a worldwide fame. Their world-conquering smile shouldn't be faded. Give them a fair chance. Sure, they can change the whole landscape of sustainable development interventions. If Bangladesh succeeds in implementing SEM, then the country would win the real battle. There is light at the end of the tunnel.

Small Steps for a Major Cause

HERE are the major areas of intervention mapped out in the SEM:

Capacity Building for Environmental Legislations / Policy Analysis: The Ministry of Environment and Forest/World Bank is to enhance environmental policy legislation development and analysis capability of MOEF, Planning Commission, sectoral ministries, agencies, civil society bodies. It is expected to improve inter-ministerial and inter-agency coordination in environment management and support institutionalisation of environmental capacity in public, private and NGO sectors.

Mainstreaming Environment in National Planning: Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS) is to develop environmental statistics, facilitate integration of environmental concerns into national planning, integrate environmental accounting in national accounting system.

Sharing of Common Regional Resources: Bangladesh Unnayan Parishad (BUP) is to develop modalities for sharing of common regional resources, such as water, land, energy and environment with neighbouring countries for sustainable use, establish a network of research organisations in neighbouring countries and conduct studies on cooperation strategies and disseminate findings through workshop, books.

Modernisation of Land Records and Maps for Sustainable Environment Management: Department of Land Records and Survey (DLRS) is to undertake pilot study, digitize mouza maps and prepare a data base on land use and land administration/management in one thana. It is to make policy recommendations on land use management.

Coastal Land Use Zoning in the South West: Environment and Geographic Information System (EGIS), Ministry of Water Resources is to undertake studies on coastal land use zoning in the South West of Bangladesh, collect satellite images and other maps of the study area, develop a coastal area resource map, and present the draft report at local and national level workshops.

Environmental Policy Studies: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) is to carryout and disseminate findings of studies on two important environmental policy issues, publish those findings in journals and books.

Community Based Haor and Floodplain Management: World Conservation Union (IUCN) is to establish participatory community based sustainable resource management in two partially degraded wetlands in two haors in Sunamganj and two floodplain sites (Jumuna-Brahmaputra and Madhumati Floodplains), collect base line data on fisheries, agriculture, wildlife, vegetation/forest, formed organised groups, train them on management of environment and provide microcredit support for wetland rehabilitation.

Sustainable Resource Management in Brackish Water Areas: CARITAS is to develop sustainable resource management methods in the brackish water areas of South West coast of Bangladesh, form beneficiary groups to reduce salinity problems, drainage congestion, aquaculture, health and sanitation problems, establish demonstration rice-shrimp farms and plant nurseries and provide micro-credit to beneficiary groups for rice-shrimp farming.

Sustainable Livelihood in Riverine Charlands: Gono Chetana is to demonstrate sustainable livelihood methods, improve flood preparedness and disaster management capability of villagers in riverine charland in two selected unions located at the upper reach of the Jamuna river. Extend micro-credit and provide villagers with training in crop diversification, livestock rearing, homestead plantation, health and sanitation and provide some infrastructure for disaster management including boats for evacuation and flood/community centres.

Ecosystem Management in the Barind Areas: Barind Multipurpose Development Authority (BMDA) is to carry out a pilot intervention to improve the condition of dryland agro ecosystem in Barind, pond excavation works, water control structures in streams and provide special assistance to the Adivasi Community to improve its access to water, increase women's awareness of improve fuel use.

Participatory Upland Management: Ministry of Environment and Forest/district administration is to undertake participatory upland eco-system management in the Chittagong Hill Tract area.

Sustainable Rural Energy: Local Government Engineering Department (LGED) is to improve supply of community based rural energy, using different

renewable energy technologies through pilot projects in six villages and monitor results from pilot studies and utilises findings in replication and upscaling.

Community Based Water Supply and Sanitation: Department of Public Health Engineering (DPHE) is to provide community based water supply and sanitation services develop a model of a community managed WSS system and install it in selected areas as pilot intervention and replicate later disseminate findings of these micro level intervention through workshops and media.

Community-Based Urban Solid Waste Management in Dhaka: Waste Concern is to organise and train selected communities to carry out waste segregation and disposal in four municipal wards of Dhaka city, involve local community in marketing of compost and replicate and upscale the findings from the study for effective solid waste management.

Community Based Urban Waste Water Treatment: PRISM is to organise, motivate and train community members in Khulna city to take preventive measures and adopt at the source, primary reduction and construct settlement tanks and set-up community managed duckweed based waste water reduction system, replicate and upscale the findings of the study at the pilot intervention areas in Khulna City Corporation.

Community Based Rural Industrial Waste Management for Small Scale Textile Dyeing Units: Department of Environment (DOE) is to mobilise and train textile workers especially the women to undertake waste management, setup community-based water treatment facilities and train workers and community members the operation and maintenance of the treatment units.

Environmental Awareness and Monitoring at Grassroots Level: Association of Development Agencies in Bangladesh (ADAB) is to conduct activities to raise environmental awareness and improve participatory environmental monitoring at the grassroots level throughout Bangladesh. ADAB is to organise local communities and NGOs into groups and develop training modules for environmental courses for them and produce and disseminate environmental monitoring reports, journals, videos and other documents in order to raise environmental awareness throughout the country.

Mainstreaming Environment in the Media: Forum of Environmental Journalist of Bangladesh (FEJB) is to mainstream environmental concerns in the media to create mass awareness of the environmental problems and help mobilise public opinion on environmental issues by publishing quarterly newsletters, annual state of environmental report, environmental success stories, environmental abuses and disseminating findings of its monitoring activities at the grassroots levels. FEJB is to conduct training workshops and field visits for environment journalists.

Environmental Documentation: Unnayan Samonnyas (US) is to collect data on environmental condition at the grassroots levels, document and disseminate informations on environmental trends and resource uses, hold workshops to discuss findings.

Environmental Advocacy: Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers' Association (BELA) is to mobilise and train groups at local and national levels to increase public awareness of environmental laws and ensure justice for victims of environmental degradation and conduct workshops and seminars for lawyers, public and judicial officials.

Sustainable Development Network: Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) is to facilitate access to information for all sections of users from grassroots to national levels, network of government and civil society bodies and UN organisations through Internet and disseminate findings of studies of all SEM components.

Environmental Education at the Non-Formal Level: Campaign for Popular Education (CAMPE) is to organise trainers workshops for development curriculum, training and teaching materials and modules, produce and disseminate TV serials, cinema slides, folk songs and strengthen capacity NGOs in providing environmental education through non-formal education and in-tainment.

Environmental Curricula at the Primary and Secondary Level: Department of Environment (DOE) is to develop environmental curricula and teaching materials and introduce them at the primary and secondary level of education, revise and rewritten textbooks and introduce new environmental subjects and develop audio-visual aids on environmental education and guidelines for teachers training and workshops.

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The beauty of SEM is that out of 22 sub-implementing agencies (SIAs), 13 are civil society bodies and NGOs with on-going successful programmes at grass-roots level.

The Partner

'People Own Solution if Consulted'

UNDP is a major development partner. This multilateral agency has been playing a key role in Bangladesh's sustainable development efforts. UNDP Resident Representative David Lockwood had a long conversation with Quamrul Islam Chowdhury on the whole spectrum of sustainable environment management challenges. Excerpts:

In terms of pollution, deforestation and micro climate change, Bangladesh is very vulnerable. Marginal land, deforestation and protecting riverbank erosion are some of the major problems the country is facing. As the population has sky rocketed, exploitation of limited resources also got momentum. The local people know the carrying capacity of resources. They are caught up in the poverty trap. They look at the necessity of today. They can't see tomorrow.

People are suffering from deforestation. They pass on to their children, succeeding generations. The people are aware of it. Economic pressure is enormous. But, they know the carrying capacity. It is not difficult to deal with the grassroots people. Consulting them is an eye-opening experience. They are directly affected by any interventions. They own the problem. They own the solutions if they are consulted.

When you look at the poverty alleviation issue, environment and the whole process of development, you know the urgency for integrating environment into your development thinking. Unless you integrate environment into your development, you can't achieve sustainable development.

If scientists are correct, 17.5 per cent of Bangladesh territory will be lost in the sea. Bangladesh will be affected by the sea-level rise, though she is not responsible much for the global warming. Bangladesh is seen to be managing her policies on environment very effectively. If Bangladesh succeeds in managing her environment, she will be better equipped to speak out her problems at the global level. Bangladesh should first stand on her ground by reducing her carbon emissions and stopping other sources of emissions. Only then Bangladesh can suggest others to abide by their commitment.

You need to have a national policy. NEMAP is there. What is all-important is that this plan was prepared during previous government. But, the present government is implementing that action plan. It is not partisan. Look at it. NEMAP is a long-term plan. It took a long time to formulate. Some other countries are now using it as a model. The whole range of issues and peoples thinking are there in this most beautiful action plan. This plan

The Bureaucrat

'We Believe in Consultation'

ENVIRONMENT and Forest Secretary Syed Marghubur Murshed is known as an environment friendly bureaucrat. He is now putting his efforts in managing Bangladesh's fragile environment. Syed Murshed shares some of his thoughts with Quamrul Islam Chowdhury. Excerpts:

Our environmental problems are acute. We have pursued development without giving due regards to environmental problems, sustainable development issues. Other countries have also ignored environmental issues in the past. Added pressure of population and poverty caused degradation of environment to a great extent. I'm optimistic, I believe with a coordinated effort by government, NGOs, civil society bod-

ies, we will be able to conserve our nature. We can't take environment for granted.

We have been successful in establishing linkages between environment and forestry. We are aware of climate change and likely effects of the sea level rise. Our mangrove forest, the Sunderbans, would be adversely affected by the sea level rise. Afforestation is therefore very essential as it is the conservation of forest, which promotes natural carbon sink.

The government has taken up measures to increase carbon sink by creating Coastal Green Belt along our coastline. We have seen when rest of the country came under the fury of cyclone, mangrove cover remained outside of that fury. We are trying to face cyclones by

expanding mangrove covers. We intend to increase Carbon Sink across the country. It will also help reduce the wind speed of cyclone and tornadoes. More areas will be brought under tree cover by social forestry.

We have also undertaken watershed management with FAO/Dutch expertise. 1400 square kilometers of Sunderbans has been declared as World Heritage Site. We intend to develop Eco-tourism there. We have also initiated Bio-diversity project in the Sunderbans. We are also launching other conservation projects. We are in the process of developing Bay Park from Himgachi to Teknaf where Eco-tourism will be developed.

There is a moratorium on felling trees in the Sunderbans.

Invoking Environment Conservation act 1995, we are in the process of declaring some waterbodies of Kushtia, Jessore and Jhenaidha as Environmentally Sensitive Areas. We have destroyed our natural aquifers. We must stop it now. Our groundwater table is falling.

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