

Protecting the Environment

NEMAP is a Marvel But it's Magic Could Fade

BANGLADESH'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 Management Programme (SEMP). All decks have recently been cleared to kick off SEMP. 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, hey, 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 SEMP is a glaring example.

Weathered in the troubled waters during the formulation phase of NEMAP and SEMP, 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 SEMP, 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

single international consultant for preparing such a planning documentation.

The entire process of formulation of both NEMAP and its follow-up SEMP had gone through both pains and pleasure. At times the process functions had their overbearings on the entire programme and at times it took to such an extent that threatened the whole process of NEMAP and SEMP. The government offices are run by the rules and processes. But people are there to overcome at times the uphills of those processes of painful and bitter ex-

sperience. The people, the grassroots 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. Declined WB has now entered in this NEMAP follow-up action. Greens see red in it. The NEMAP has been cited across the global village 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 Bangladeshi people? Can they analyze policies from a Bangladeshi 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 Bangladeshi environment. This entire amount can be utilised for some other intervention areas for upscaling the programme. The marvel of both NEMAP and SEMP foundation is that during their formulation, Bangladesh didn't use a single foreign consultant.

Dr Mahfuzul Haque who drafted SEMP and currently SEMP 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 SEMP 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, SEMP 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 SEMP 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 pit 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 SIs. But the rest have been left out for some other programmes. Even each of the SIs are not given adequate budgetary resources to do the long task. The chosen SIs are not given any allocation for accommodation or office space required for upscaling their ongoing programme suited with the priorities of SEMP. So many little things are missing which may lead to crack this noble programme.

Landmine Inside SEMP
The marvel of the SEMP 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.

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Waiting for NEMAP to deliver

Photo: Zahedul Khan

periences. 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 SEMP a success.

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