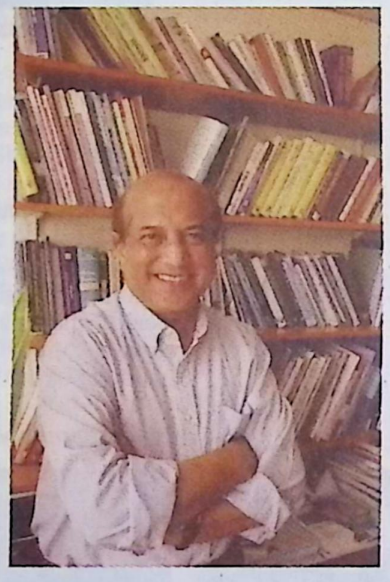
Interview of Mushtaque Chowdhury

Dean of the James P Grant School of Public Health



MUSHTAQUE CHOWDHURY, PhD is the Dean of the BRAC University James P Grant School of Public Health. He is the Deputy Executive Director of BRAC where he oversees the health programs, which include maternal, newborn and child health, tuberculosis control, water, sanitation and hygiene, HIV/AIDS prevention, and nutrition.

Dr. Chowdhury is also a Professor of Population and Family Health at the Mailman School of Public Health of Columbia University in New York, and serves on the boards of many international initiatives and journals. He was a co-coordinator of the *Millennium Task Force on Child Health and Maternal Health* and of the *Joint Learning Initiative* Working group on Priority Diseases. He is the co-recipient of the 'Innovator of the Year 2006' award given by the Marriott Business School of Brigham Young University in USA for his work in making *reading glasses* available to the poor for improved livelihood.

In an interview with **Mahdin Mahboob** of Star Campus, Dr Chowdhury has spoken about the various aspects of the MPH program at BRAC University.

Star Campus (SC): The MPH Program at BRAC University is known to be the first of its kind (among private universities) in the country and one of the world's best. Please tell us in details how this program has ranked compared to other such schools worldwide and in Bangladesh?

Dr. Mushtaque Chowdhury (DMC): The BRAC School of Public Health was set up in 2004. The flagship programme of the School is the Master of Public Health (MPH), which opened its door to students in early 2005. Afterwards, many other universities in the private sector have also started MPH programmes. This proves two things: one is that the BRAC School is a pioneer and the second is that there is a demand for such a degree in Bangladesh. Globally, the BRAC School has earned a name for itself already. In any meeting on public health education, we are invited to share our experiences. The US universities implementing global health programmes have recently started a consortium and we were invited to speak at its launching at the University of California in San Francisco. The Bulletin of the World Health Organization, a most prestigious journal published by WHO, show-cased six schools in the world as examples of innovation and the BRAC School was one of them.

SC: Who are the students that study for this program? Are there scholarship opportunities for meritorious Bangladeshi / International students?

DMC: We take 30 students every year for the MPH. Diversity is an important aspect of any educational programme and that's why we ensure that half of our students are women, half are non-physicians (meaning half are doctors) and half are international. In the current batch the students come from 12 countries of Asia, Africa, Europe and North America. To attract the best students, we do offer scholarships. However, students coming from the first world have to pay the full tuition.

SC: What are the biggest achievements of this program?

DMC: The School has already made a mark for itself in the world of public health education. It is a young institution but we already have graduated 77 students through the MPH programme. Hundreds of others have attended short courses that we offer on various public health issues. All the graduates are now employed in governments, NGOs, universities, research organizations, media and donor agencies and are contributing to improving the health of the population, which is our ultimate aim. The School is also contributing to many current debates in public health. It works as the Secretariat for the Bangladesh Health Watch, a civil society initiative. In the most recent report of the Watch, the issue of the human resources in health was highlighted. It sparked a lot of attention among different stakeholders. There are a number of ways through which a higher education programme is evaluated. One robust indicator is how the reputed universities in the North (and South) recognize