

RIO+20, POPULATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Is 'green economy' the answer?

"The population issue must be incorporated in the sustainable development agenda of the forthcoming Rio+20 Conference ... without checking the population, sustainable development is not possible"

PROBIR KUMAR SARKER

THE UN Conference on Sustainable Development (UNCSD) must take decisive action on population and consumption regardless of political taboos or it will struggle to tackle the alarming decline of the global environment.

The warning came from the world's leading scientific academies on Thursday. "The rich countries need to reduce or radically transform unsustainable lifestyles, while greater efforts should be made to provide contraception to those who want it in the developing world, said the coalition of 105 institutions, the Royal Society.

It's a wake-up call for negotiators meeting in Rio for this week's Rio+20 Earth summit.

Rio+20 will be the largest summit the UN has ever organised. It comes two decades after the original Rio Earth summit, with 190 countries meeting to discuss plans to grow the "green economy".

The summit will take place in Rio de Janeiro from June 20 to 22. Before that, a meeting of the preparatory committee was held from June 13 to 15, while a "People's Summit" of NGOs and other representatives of grassroots opinion is being held from June 15 to 23.

As many as 130 leaders will participate in the formal session. In addition, it is estimated that 50,000 participants from civil society and business groups will take part in side events and the People's Summit.

The objectives of the Rio+20 are: to secure renewed political commitment to sustainable development; to assess progress towards internationally agreed goals on sustainable development and to address new and emerging challenges.

The Summit will also focus on two specific themes: a green economy in the context of poverty eradication and sustainable development, and an institutional framework for sustainable development.

The final round of negotiations leading up to the Rio+20 summit began on Wednesday with countries very much at odds on key issues. The draft agreement would improve energy, water and food

security in poorer countries, phase out fossil fuel subsidies and boost ocean protection. However, one source close to the talks told BBC News that negotiators had been talking about punctuation, not principles.

The scientific academies in the report pointed out that while the Rio summit aims to reduce poverty and reverse the degradation of the environment, it barely mentions the two solutions that could ease pressure



on increasingly scarce resources, The Guardian reports.

In a joint statement, the scientists said they wanted to remind policymakers at Rio+20 that population and consumption determine the rates at which natural resources are exploited and Earth's ability to meet the demand for food, water, energy and other needs now and in the future. The current patterns of consumption in some parts of the world were unsustainable.

A sharp rise in human numbers can have negative social and economic implications, and a combination of the two causes, extensive loss of biodiversity.

The statement follows a hard-hitting report by the Royal Society in April that called for rebalancing of resources to reduce poverty and ease environmental pressures that are leading to a more unequal and inhospitable future.

By 2050, the world's population is projected to rise from seven billion to between eight and 11 billion. Meanwhile, consumption of resources is rising rapidly as a result of a growing middle-class in developed

countries and the lavish lifestyles of the very rich across the planet.

The scientific academies stressed that poverty reduction remain a priority, but said action to promote voluntary family planning through education, better healthcare and contraception can aid that process.

Rio+20 makes little mention of potential solutions. In the draft text, key passages that mention the need for "sustainable patterns of production and consumption" may be cut in the face of opposition by wealthy nations.

There is also little recognition in the text that economic growth might be limited by ecological factors. This is partly because although scientists talk about "global boundaries", there is no agreement on where they might lie.

The stock taking of global inventory is



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a strong mandate to take this forward.

Alongside concrete commitments to action, Rio+20 is a one-off opportunity to kickstart the journey to a new set of global goals. The bottom line for the Rio summit is to agree a new vision and a single process for a set of truly global goals to succeed the MDGs when they expire in 2015.

Incredibly, right now it looks like Rio could create two global silos for discussion on environment and development. One would focus on sustainable development goals' (SDGs) and the other on MDGs. They'd hold separate meetings at different times -- but inevitably discuss the same issues. 1992 marked a truly global commitment to sustainable development. It would be a fatal mistake to separate these agendas in 2012.

Obama-Cameron skip summit

The political weight is tilted heavily



towards emerging economies and developing nations. Brazil, Russia, India and China will be represented by national leaders. In Europe the picture is mixed: France and Spain are among those participating at the highest level.

US President Barack Obama, UK's David Cameron and Germany's Angela Merkel will skip the summit billed as a "once-in-a-generation opportunity" to make progress on global development.

Reaction in Bangladesh

According to the environment and forests minister, Bangladesh expects a renewed commitment from the developed world in the coming Rio+20 conference to achieve the SDGs in the post 2015 era.

Hasan Mahmud last month said Bangladesh was on the right track in achieving the MDGs as its poverty level came down to 31 percent. He said Bangladesh was ahead of many South Asian countries in terms of achieving MDGs in women empowerment, food security and health sector.

The minister also thinks the growing

population has been the main barrier to the country's sustainable development. "The population issue must be incorporated in the sustainable development agenda of the forthcoming Rio+20 Conference ... without checking the population, sustainable development is not possible," news agency UNB quoted him as saying at a national consultation in mid-May.

Hasan said if the population keeps on growing, carbon emission will rise. "The number of industries and vehicles are on the rise due to growing population. So, the population boom is creating obstacles to sustainable development," he said.

The minister said Bangladesh will be self-sufficient in food within the next year, but it will be difficult to maintain the status if the growth of the country's population cannot be checked.

At another programme, Energy Adviser to the Prime Minister Tawfiq-e-Elahi Chowdhury recently said the developed world should emphasise on quality rather than quantity in energy production while the developing world may go for quantity for their development.

He blames the developed world for carbon emission while saying that the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) like Bangladesh are the worst victims to climate change.

Lawmaker Saber Hossain Chowdhury thinks Bangladesh should focus on "disaster management" in setting its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in the post 2015 era.

However, environmentalists, experts and civil society leaders at a conference in Dhaka early June censured the "anti-environment proposals" of the developed nations in the name of green economy. Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Fellow Debapriya Bhattacharya said sustainable development would not be possible without the change of consumption patterns in the developed countries.

He also questioned the justification of green economy in a country like Bangladesh, and added that the Europeans took the idea of green economy as a remedy to revive their economy from the existing recession.

Another speaker at the programme, Chief Executive of Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association, Syeda Rizwana Hasan alleged that the developed countries were imposing on the developing nations "the burden of green economy" without any consultation.

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For endearing environment

Only awareness and love for the country can save our environment from pollution. Let us work together for ourselves and our future generations... If the environment is sick, we will be sick, too.

SHEGUFTA YASMIN

PRESENTLY the most often uttered words are environment, pollution, climate change etc in Bangladesh. Yet while the entire world is busy in thinking about our environment, we are too busy to manage our daily life. Sometimes it's a luxury for many to think about future impacts of climate change as we have to struggle every moment for bare existence through host of crises. But it's true that we are creating a hellish future for our future generations misusing our present.

As a nation we are now frustrated

with the state of our country, its politicians, corruption, poverty etc. The best thing we do nationally is 'overlooking'. Every day we are overlooking happenings in our surroundings -- ill treatments, misdeeds, illegal activities, disloyalty etc. In this situation it's very tough to build up awareness among general people about our environment, its destruction and pollution etc. We need an educated, conscious citizens group who will convince others that we need a radical change in our attitude.

Every day we see news of deforestation, dying river, air pollution by brick fields, water pollution by

chemical waste of mills and factories etc. But we don't care; because for us more important is saving ourselves from road accident, kidnapping and hijacking etc. Our ears, eyes, brains are tired of thinking and talking over these issues. Every day we are destroying our valuable asset environment by polluting air, water, soil and clearing green coverage.

We have many environmental laws in books, but these are seldom practiced. Recently we found that only a few cases have seen positive results. There are more than hundred cases filed by BELA, BAPA, POBA against ship breaking and other polluting industries.

In a seminar on ministries' role in containing environment pollution, speakers claimed that though there are at least fifteen ministries involved with environmental issues, but they are not active at all.

United Nations thinks that for climate change in future peace and security of entire world will be in danger. World temperature is expected to rise 4 degree Celsius and sea level will rise one metre by next century. If it happens, there will be no Sundarbans.

We get some alarming news from scientists that by 2050 almost half of Bangladesh will be under sea. But we don't find so much seriousness among citizens, government or policy makers about this. The way we forget any dangerous news of murder after few days, same way we also forget about this kind of alarming situation or data.

In future our agriculture and fisheries sectors will be highly affected for seasons' shrinking. In future summer and rainy season

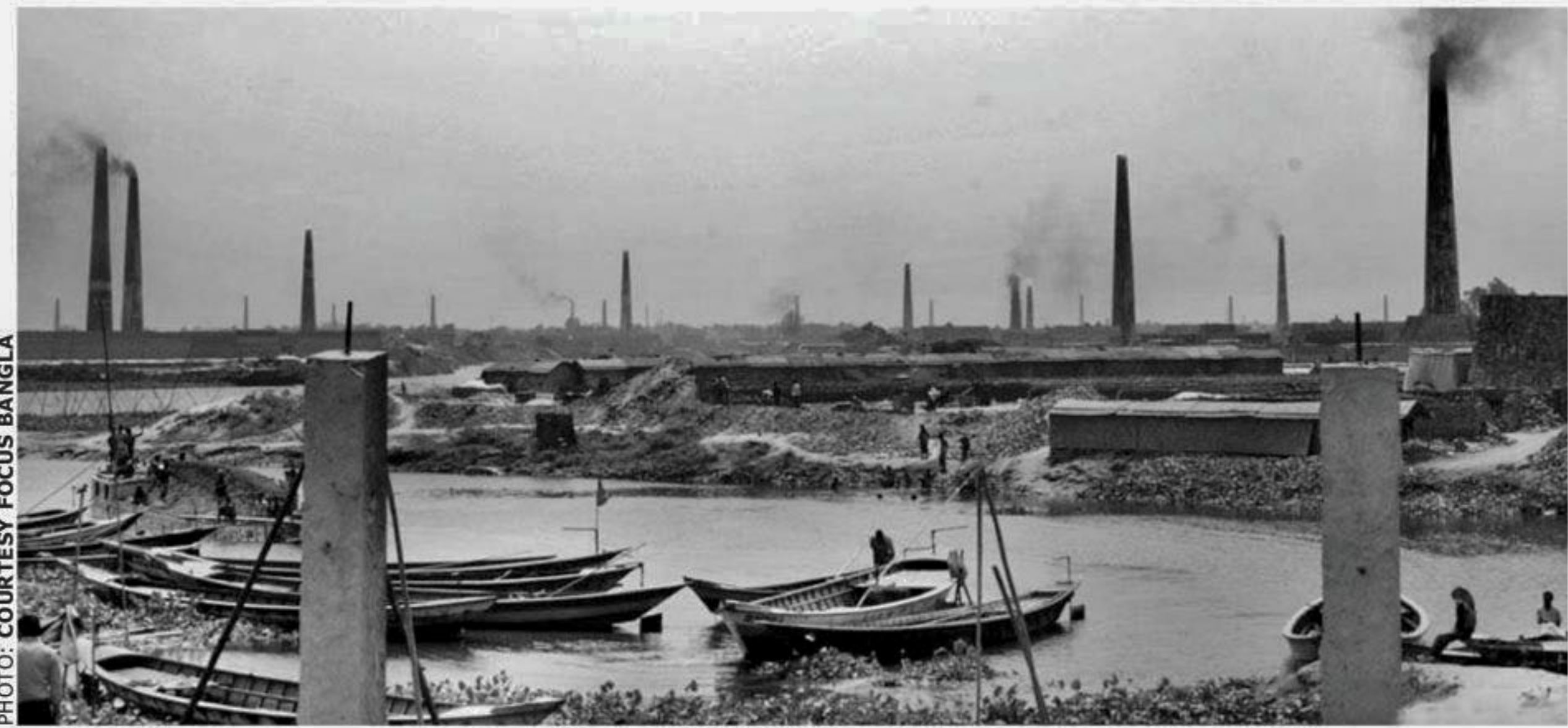


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will be prolonged, autumn and spring will be diminished. By 2050 production of foodgrains will be less by 32 per cent. If sea area expands there will be scarcity of drinking water as well.

There is a law that no brick field can be set around three kilometers of forest. But this rule is not maintained. They use earth from hill and river to make brick and to burn brick forest trees are used.

In the developed countries reconditioned cars are not allowed to be used, but in Bangladesh we use these frequently. Though there is a govt. rule not to use reconditioned car for more than five years, but this law is also frequently broken. Every day city dwellers mostly suffer from air pollution. Except CNG driven vehicles, other vehicles use diesel and petrol which emit carbon-di-oxide (CO₂), carbon mono oxide (CO), hydro carbon (HC) etc.

On an average every day four thousand metric tons of waste of

Dhaka city dwellers mix with soil and five rivers around Dhaka. If we add the waste of mills and factories that may be forty thousand metric tons. All these waste make our rivers almost dead. Buriganga River bears a ten feet layer of waste! Once people took bath in the river, now it's even harmful for animals. Three hundred chemical compounds were found in nineteen cubic feet of the river water! We can understand the risk from one fact: Chromium creates cancer in human body which we get from tannery waste.

If we can't save our rivers from pollution we have to lose fishes, mammals, birds from our environment. We have to bring major changes in our lifestyles to save our environment. But no one is punished in Bangladesh for urinating in the open, no one is punished for public smoking, not to speak no one is punished for throwing garbage in open street. We need strong law and its execution for protecting environ-

ment.

Parks, green fields need to be protected from illegal occupation to keep the city as much possible green. Anyhow we have to control our population growth, have to decentralize facilities throughout the country, then Dhaka city can take a breath and the citizens may experience lesser pollution of environment.

Only awareness and love for the country can save our environment from pollution. Let us work together for ourselves and our future generations. May be the environment, air, water, rivers cannot talk, cannot protest, but one day they will revolt in such a vigorous way that we, human beings, just cannot do anything to protect ourselves. Let's not make our environment our enemy or vice versa what we are doing. If it is sick, we will be sick, too.

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