

NATURAL RESOURCE GOVERNANCE

A prerequisite for sustainable development

Governance refers to sustaining coordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives. These actors may include politicians and institutions, interest groups, civil society, non-governmental and transnational organizations.

RUKSHANA SULTANA

THE constitution of Bangladesh - article 143-- illustrates that all natural resources on land and underground minerals and other things of value underlying the ocean within the territorial waters, or the ocean over the continental shelf of Bangladesh, are the properties of Bangladesh. In general, natural resources include oil and gas, minerals and metals, forests, fish, land and water. In Bangladesh, some 83% of the total population explicitly depends on natural resources. Therefore, to ensure sustainable use of these resources is important to establish natural resource governance practice.

Principles of governance

To establish natural resource governance (NRG), it is necessary to incorporate of governance in the constitution to ensure their practical application. Among these principles, accountability, transparency, the rule of law and participation are considered as pillars of governance. The principles listed below are not necessarily applicable for every organization practicing governance. It varies on the socio-economic condition of the country and the parallel support provided by the constitution of the organization.

- **Accountability** is one of the prerequisites of governance. It suggests that elected public officials are entitled to be responsive to the entity from which they derive authority and are answerable to for their actions, activities and decisions. With accountability comes liability which is considered as a second form of accountability.

- **Transparency** and accountability are interrelated and mutually reinforced. Without transparency it would be difficult to call public sector entities to account. This principle is built on the free flow of information to the public to render them understandable and monitorable.
- Government should offer all stakeholders say in the decision making process and implementation facilitating their participation, so that they can exercise influence over public policy decisions and share control of resources and institutions that affect their lives. This broad participation, built on freedom of association and speech, can occur at the grassroots, local government and regional and national levels.
- **Rule of law** or predictability is a prerequisite to facilitate governance. It will help stakeholders to know the rules in advance thus the state agencies or subsidiaries or private enterprises and individuals will be bound by and answerable to the legal system.
- Access to **information and justice**
- Respect for **human rights**
- **Equity**
- **Strategic vision**
- Commitment to the **public good**
- **Social capital** which the World Bank defines in reference to the institutions, relationships and norms that shape the quality and quantity of a society's social interactions. This is a very strong principle of governance that not necessarily refers to the sum of the institutions that underpin society rather it works as glue that holds them together.
- **Political stability** and absence of violence
- **Regulatory quality**
- Promoting an enabling legal and

judicial framework

Actors involved

Jon Pierre definition of governance refers to sustaining coordination and coherence among a wide variety of actors with different purposes and objectives. These actors may include politicians and institutions, interest groups, civil society, non-governmental and transnational organizations.

In Bangladesh, UN bodies, local NGOs, INGOs, donor organizations, civil society, CBOs are working in coherence with the local administration.

Challenges and possible solutions

Still unstable economically and politically, Bangladesh needs to shed light on establishing natural resource governance. However, the writer identifies a number of problems to be taken care of. These are:

- **Improper understanding of NRG:** The writer understood that there is a knowledge gap in understanding natural resource governance. This is confusing especially for the grassroots, level resource users. Since the terminologies are still fresh and leave a lot of room to experiment with redefining and practicing it is necessary to be prudent and maintain clarity while applying the terms to make others understand.
- One possible solution to this could be enlightening the government officials, policy makers, managers, civil society and the local authorities through interactive training and workshops.
- **Dependency on government:** Large-scale dependency on government can underpin implementation of NRG in practice in Bangladesh. It is also a deviation from the main theme of governance.
- This dependency can be reduced by making the civil society more active. Also strengthening the local authority can play a pivotal role in power decentralization. It is also necessary to strengthen the CBOs by providing sufficient training.
- **No/minimum integration within the institutions:** In Bangladesh, most of the developmental activities are hindered by lack of integration within



Water and forests are our main natural resources

the government agencies. This could cause the whole society suffer in natural resource governance practice.

Initiatives can be taken to minimize this institutional gap. Appropriate measures include prudent collaboration within the government, institutions, civil society, local NGOs and CBOs.

- **Lack of constitutional recognition:** The term 'natural resource governance' is yet to be recognized by the constitution of Bangladesh. It requires majority support by the parliament members.

Since it is a very complex and sensitive issue government can publish gazettes in relation to natural resource governance.

- **Ineffective civil society:** One of the prerequisites of governance is the active presence of civil society. Here, in most cases, civil society voice is absent.

Civil society reform can help capacity-building within the civil services. Civil society can act as a pressure group.

- **Lack of appropriate policy:** Since NRG lacks constitutional recognition, the local authority lacks guidance and suffers in taking preventive measures.

Appropriate policy reform and intervention is a current need to

establish NRG.

- **Ineffective and non-functional local govt. authority:** It is one of the prime threats to establishment of natural resource governance.

Empowerment of local authorities can help in this regard.

- **Political instability:** Unstable political situation can NRG practice vulnerable.

To handle such situation government needs to ensure the presence of every political party in policy reform. A strong civil society movement can also help minimise political influence.

- **CBOs lack voice:** Most of the CBOs are formed by a flock of poor people who are the resource users. Within them illiteracy rate is very high so they lack proper knowledge and remain unaware of their strength.

These people should be trained to create awareness within them.

- **Noncooperative law and enforcement squad:** The law and enforcement squad is corrupted in most cases and does not offer any service to the poor people.

To make the squad effective government needs to reform the policy and remove political pressure on them.

- **Dependency on natural resource usage:** As mentioned earlier some

83% of total population largely depends on natural resources. The reasons of this reliance need to be addressed.

They can be trained to have alternative livelihoods.

- **Conflict:** Since a large population depends of natural resources for their livelihood conflict with the protectors is high in some areas.

This could be minimised by creating awareness.

- **Corruption:** One of the key problems of NRG implementation is corruption at the every layer of government.

Policy intervention and decentralisation can help in reduction of corruption.

- **Poverty:** Poverty is one the major issues in NRG practice. Greed intrigued by poverty causes excessive natural resource extraction pushing the vulnerability limit.

Poverty reduction should be a priority goal.

- **Lack of resourceful personnel:** This is a major threat to establishment of NRG practice in Bangladesh.

Effective training and education can help fill this gap.

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It's high time to go green

The UNEP defines Green Economy as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities.

MAHFUJUR RAHMAN

WORLD Environment Day is observed every year to raise public awareness on environmental issues. The United Nations Environment Programme working on environmental issues declared the theme of world environment day 2012 with a query 'Green Economy: Does it include you?' The answer of course, is obvious: participation.

The concept of 'green economy' presented by UNEP focuses on the issues related to human well-being, environment and climate change. Unsustainable living and livelihood of people are harming the ecosystems of the planet. Green economy aims at improving people's living standard without compromising environmental degradation. Greenhouse gases emitting from power and energy sector, industry and transport sector are responsible for global warming led climate change. As climate change is a multidimensional environmental disaster green economy would act as the means to face the challenge.

Generation and distribution of wealth, development and access to resources, production and consumption are important areas of an economy. The UNEP defines Green Economy as one that results in improved human well-being and social equity, while significantly reducing environmental risks and ecological scarcities. In its simplest expression, a green economy can be thought of as one which is low carbon, resource efficient and socially inclusive. In fact, the concept of 'green economy' merged in it the themes of 'sustainable development' and 'low carbon economy'.

UNEP has identified 10 potential areas where we need to work for pro-

moting green economy 1. Manufacturing and Industry; 2. Fisheries; 3. Forestry; 4. Transport; 5. Water; 6. Agriculture; 7. Energy Supply; 8. Tourism; 9. Waste; 10. Buildings.

Whether it is like or unlike others, Bangladesh needs to address all these 10 areas for sustainable development.

Manufacturing and Industry: Sustainable production and consumption are two vital areas to be addressed for promoting sustainable development. As an underdeveloped, still to be an industrialized country, Bangladesh has many things to do to make its industrial growth and manufacturing industry more sustainable and environment friendly. Its textile and tannery industries are booming in recent times producing major export items. These two need special attention because they are holding a potential very crucial for the economy. But there are many things to do to make them environmentally and socially acceptable. Effluents from dying and tannery industries are hugely blamed for surface water pollution.

Fisheries: Fisheries contribute 4.91% to GDP and 5.10% to foreign exchange earning through export in Bangladesh. Fish provides 63% of national animal protein consumption. Fisheries sector plays an important role in rural employment and poverty alleviation. The country is crisscrossed by hundreds of rivers. The climate is unique for aquaculture and fisheries resource management. The Bay of Bengal borders the whole south of the country.

Processed shrimp is number one fisheries product as well as one of the major export items of Bangladesh in the world market. Still the shrimp production is not done in sustainable



Wind power is green

manner. Soil salinity and open water pollution with feed, medicine and chemicals used in shrimp culture are common phenomena in south western region of the country.

Forestry: Forests of Bangladesh need to be brought under sustainable forestry where the people are right in conduct and action, and ecosystem health and economic benefits are maintained. Good forest management had always been absent in Bangladesh that has entailed degradation and denudation of forest land.

aim of traffic management is not only to avoid human death and injury and material damage, but also to improve quality of atmosphere and life on the street. Only then benefits of sustainable transport can be enjoyed by people. Sustainable transport can ensure safety as well as protect the environment from emission pollution.

Water: Water not only supports life sustaining processes in the nature but also is crucial as a resource for economic development. Ponds are used as medium of aquaculture, canals for local transportation and irrigation, rivers for national transportation and source of food (fish), oceans as way of cheap international transportation and big-scale fishing. However, the water systems around the globe are getting polluted day by day in a way that it seems we would loose this as resource one day soon, if no corrective measures are taken now.

Agriculture: Agriculture is the oldest trade of people who engaged themselves in it for growing food instead of collecting it by hunting other animals lower in food chain. Even these days of high-tech science and technology, perhaps the most crucial contribution is from agriculture for the livelihood of people, that is, providing food.

But features of sustainable agriculture, such as -- Organic Farming, Biological Control of Pest, Conserving Biological Diversity of Agro-ecosystem, Rotation of Crops, Conserving Soil from Erosion and Degradation, Ensuring Materials Cycling: A Mimic of natural Ecosystem, are steel absent from most parts of it.

Energy Supply: An energy system comprises its production, distribution and utilization regimes. The conventional energy system is based on fossil fuels -- coal, mineral oil and natural gas. When burnt these fuels produce CO2 and emitted by power stations this mix with automobiles exhaust contributing to global warming and climate change. So, it is urgent to construct an energy system based on renewable energy sources to secure future of the planet earth. The major

renewable sources are solar energy, wind power, tidal power and biomass energy.

Tourism: Sustainable tourism is wise planning and implementation of activities of the sector that develops infrastructure and conducts tours without harming the ecosystems. Bangladesh lacks tour infrastructures hugely needed to harness the potentials of the sector in national economy but keeping an intent eye on the safety of essential ecosystems.

Waste: Waste management system includes waste collection, processing and disposal. Various mechanisms are applied in the process. For environment friendly disposal various components of waste should be carefully segregated. For different physical, chemical and biological properties there separately deserve distinctive disposal. It will not be wise to burn the waste that can be composted to produce environment friendly biofertilizer and biogas through anaerobic decomposition in a digester. And nothing should be left to pollute environment.

Buildings: Buildings account for one-sixth of the world's fresh water withdrawals, one-quarter of its wood harvest, and two-fifths of its material and energy flows. Greening construction of building is an opportunity to use our resources efficiently -- creating healthier buildings that improve human health, create a better environment, and provide cost savings. A green building, also known as a sustainable building, is a structure that is designed, built, renovated, operated, or reused in an ecological and resource-efficient manner reducing the overall impact on the environment.

Concluding remarks
Mitigation of climate change impact is vital for all nations regardless of their development status. In foreseeable future, all nations shall have to, or be bound to, take low carbon strategy for development. So, it is high time to start to go green without any hesitation or delay.

The writer is an environment and development activist.