

## **BOOK REVIEW**

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Ainun Nishat, Mahfuz Ullah, A.K. Enamul Haque (Eds.), *Bangladesh Environment Outlook 2001*, (Dhaka: Centre For Sustainable Development (CFSD), 2001), 188 pp., Price Tk.300/US\$50.

This book is a compilation of eight articles which address major environmental issues facing Bangladesh such as, economic growth and implications for environmental changes, bio-diversity, water supply and sanitation problems, urbanization and environmental threats, industrial pollution, agricultural practices and environmental degradation, and natural disasters and environmental consequences. As stated in the introductory chapter of the book, the main purpose of the volume has been to provide an up-date on the current state of environment in Bangladesh and project future trends and challenges facing the country against the background of future developmental challenges faced and initiatives required to be undertaken and their implications for environmental conditions.

Given this objective, the authors have sought to answer the following pertinent questions: What is the state of Bangladesh's environment? How is the country's environment being influenced by the development activities? What are the factors contributing to the process of environmental degradation? What steps are being taken by the Government and private sector organizations to mitigate the impacts? How does the future look like in the context of overall environmental issues and concerns? Thus, the book is designed to identify the key environmental issues and challenges facing Bangladesh and provide guidelines for environmental planning, policy formulation and corrective options that may be undertaken to offset possible negative environmental trends.

Needless to emphasize, the present book is a very useful and timely addition to the stock of knowledge and information on the

challenges confronting both developed and developing countries relating to sustainable development. While the subject is the most widely discussed and debated one at the national and global levels, it remains inadequately understood and seriously challenging. The environmental problems such as, global climate change, ozone depletion, air and water pollution, and resource degradation compounded by an ever-expanding world population pose a host of colossal long-term problems. More importantly, these problems are inadequately studied and remain far from being understood particularly, in the poor countries like Bangladesh. This underscores the importance of publishing a book as the present volume dealing with various environmental problems facing Bangladesh, mapping their future trends and direction, and providing guidelines to tackle them.

A brief introduction to the contents of the book is in order. The choice and presentation of the eight chapters have been skillful and logical. In a short but careful introduction to the book in only twelve pages, the editors have adequately summarized the articles.

The "Introduction" of the book that summarizes eight chapters, succinctly synthesizes the major issues raised, identifies the most immediate environmental concerns facing Bangladesh and suggests courses of both short and long-term corrective actions. While the authors do not find the present state of environmental degradation to be alarming, they consider the trends towards future degradation as being discouraging. High density of Bangladesh's population, rapid urbanization process, increasing pressure on land and water resources, natural disasters etc. are identified as leading factors adversely affecting our environmental conditions.

Chapter 1, "Economy and Environment", written by Mahub Ullah examines how various types of economic activities have significant impact on environmental conditions. Starting with the pressure of population on land, he discusses the impacts of economic

growth and poverty and, thus, shows how the compulsions of achieving higher growth and reducing poverty in a developing country like Bangladesh creates a dilemma for the planners and policy makers. He then goes on to analyze how environmental pollution is caused by growth in industry, urbanization, shrimp culture etc. On the basis of analysis, he depicts how we loose soil fertility, incur deforestation and depletion of fish and other resources through continuous use and re-use of other resources to meet our livelihood. While we have to pursue economic growth to raise our living standards rendering environmental damages inescapable, we must make conscious efforts at keeping the damages to a minimum level. Our growth must be cleaner, equitable and sustainable.

Chapter 2, authored by M. H. Khan deals with the pervasively important issues of "Bio-diversity", an environmental issue that has become of great concern to ecologists and others in the recent years. Mr. Khan has discussed the current status of various ecosystems and species diversity, which together constitute bio-diversity. Though Bangladesh was once rich in biodiversity, current population pressure, habitat loss, pollution and poaching are putting tremendous pressure leading to ecosystems degrading, species decline and extinction. To arrest this declining trend in bio-diversity, various regulatory and legal measures have been suggested as measures for protection, management and conservation of ecological balance.

The "Water Supply and Sanitation" issue has been discussed by Zaman and Ali in Chapter 3. Though Bangladesh achieved considerable success in safe water supply and improvements in the sanitary conditions there are regional variations and seasonal problems. While the presence of arsenic in drinking water sources poses a serious health threat to millions, saline water intrusion in the coastal areas, high iron content and depletion of ground water level in the dry season and problems of supply in the rocky and hilly areas impede adequate availability of safe water. The authors have provided a detailed account of these problems by quantifying their

extent and magnitude, and suggested necessary corrective actions required to be taken at both public and private levels.

Chapter 4 written by Bhadra and Shammin is on “Urbanization”. Bangladesh is experiencing a process of rapid urbanization which is expected to continue over the next quarter of the century, posing severe threats to environmental conditions. The authors have provided a vivid account of how the rapid urbanization process is going to pose threats towards sustaining the quality of urban environment by adversely affecting safe and healthy living conditions with enough civic facilities like employment, housing, open spaces, physical infrastructure and amenities etc.

A separate section on urban transportation and its impact on environment could be a useful addition to deal with the severe environmental problems and health hazards facing the urban people of Dhaka currently.

Chapter 5 on “Industrial Pollution” is certainly an important addition, as industrial pollution constitutes one of the great environmental threats to the modern world. Bangladesh even with a low industrial base has been no exception. Islam et. al. have provided estimates of the total pollution loads on air, water and land discharged by the industrial sector in Bangladesh. They have also quantified the variations in the degree of pollution created by different industries, providing thereby the scope for selection of right industry mixes by the policy makers. A range of appropriate pollution control measures has also been suggested to ensure monitoring of emission limits and promotion of green technologies.

Chapter 6 on “Agriculture” written by Halim and Rahman discusses environmental degradations resulting from agricultural practices in Bangladesh. Modern agricultural practices and technologies have contributed to deforestation, soil erosion, soil degradation and nutrient depletion. The problems of salinity and alkalinity, riverbank erosion etc. have also been highlighted.

Environmental and health hazards associated with the use of seed-fertilizer irrigation technology in addition to the linkage of the overall resource base in agriculture have been discussed and identified. In addition to suggesting the need for optimization of the land use pattern by ensuring a balance between increase in food production and safeguarding environment, the authors have opted to encourage the use of environment friendly technologies including the use of traditional knowledge and biotechnology.

Chapter 7 written by Chowdhury and Rahman on "Natural Disaster" deals with the major natural disasters in Bangladesh, their causes, impacts on environment and measures for their mitigation. The discussion of the natural disaster from a historical perspective provides useful insights into the causes, consequences and possible future threats to lives and environment, and emphasizes the need for adopting necessary mitigation measures.

The final chapter 8 on "People and environment" appears as an interesting and convincing campaign to adopt to the idea of what I would like to term "back to basics" campaign. Mahfuz Ulla's attempt to turn our attention from the magical power of modern science to peoples ideas, imagination, initiatives and their responses to ensure their own survival by adopting traditional and informal but useful and effective techniques to environmental protection and preservation is quite unique. The need for regeneration and re-use of traditional knowledge and practices followed by peoples of different culture, religion and faith emphasized by the author based on historical experiences is worth emulation to fight environmental hazards confronting Bangladesh as well as the modern world. The role played by the NGOs including CFSD in sensitizing people to encourage and activate them for protecting environment is indeed very useful and timely.

The editors and the authors of the individual articles are distinguished scholars in their respective areas of specialization.

Extensive research and investigation carried by the authors have enriched the book by providing high quality materials, latest information, deeper insights into the problems and pragmatic policy recommendations for their solutions. The use of maps, diagrams, charts, pictures and case studies significantly improved the overall quality of the book.

As desired by the publishers, the book will effectively serve the purpose of providing a very handy and up-to date source of information and knowledge and guidelines on the environment-development interface and its implications for environmental issues and development perspectives. The volume has been provided with a useful index and it has been printed with meticulous care and attention.

However, an important item missing in the book is a list of abbreviations, which would make it easier for the general readers to read and understand the pieces. Finally, I congratulate CFSD and all concerned for presenting us with a useful text on a highly topical subject.

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