

## IMPLEMENTATION AND COORDINATION OF BHEAP

The traditional areas which have so far been covered under environmental health have generally been the responsibility of MoH&FW or MOEF. However, with the UNCED Agenda 21 initiative and the emphasis on health and environment, BHEAP will now be required to focus on new areas. In the context of the present set up, these responsibilities fall within various sectoral agencies. The summary

of proposals for the above priority programs are given in Annex 1. The responsible sectoral agency as well as the agencies which will be involved in the program have also been identified.

The challenge now is to create a inter-agency committee for coordinating these cross-sectoral issues, which should have the authority to implement BHEAP. The required authority may be derived from the existing National Environment Council, chaired by the Hon'ble Prime Minister. On the other hand, these issues may be resolved at sectoral level through existing mechanisms. The proposed workshop on BHEAP should clarify the issue and propose a working model.

### INSTITUTIONS

Institutional constraints have always impeded management performance and optimum resource use in Bangladesh, as each line agency pursues its own objectives with little coordination and integration among sectors. The area of environmental health is no exception. More so, as there is no single authority to handle environmental health issues, the confusion is more in this sector.

The Ministry of Health and Family Welfare has the primary responsibility for health care, while the Ministry of Environment for environmental issues. Other institutions also have, either directly or indirectly, some responsibility towards health activities, which emanate from their development activities. Inter-sectoral coordination is essential in preventing and controlling the diseases caused by environmental degradation and pollution, but is sadly lacking in Bangladesh. Even the Ministry of Environment and Forests does not focus primarily on health issues, which are given only secondary considerations. This is similar for most other government agencies.

The Ministry of Health similarly has never addressed the issue of environmental health as a separate and specific issue or concern. Any action on environmental health has been the result of other health issues.

Even the different government agencies concerned with public health have never really given serious consideration to environmental health. While understanding of the inter-action between environment and health is present, no serious attention is given to the causes of environmental degradation, either through physical improvements or change in social habits, which could reduce their impacts.

In Bangladesh, the stress has always been given to curative health care, rather than to preventive health care, even though a number of institutions do exist. Immediate change towards preventive health care, some administrative re-organization, along with a concerted awareness programme may bring positive results in the near future. These would be discussed in details in the Bangladesh Health and Environment Action Plan.

All the institutions involved directly or indirectly need to be strengthened to have better understanding about environmental health and to take preventive measures to protect health from environmental causes. There should be more data generated about environmental health situation and specific research be conducted on selected environmental problems. Adequate trained manpower, logistics, equipment, and capacity building in general should be ensured accordingly.

The Department of Environment should create a cell, namely the "Environmental Health Cell". Besides environmentalists, the cell should have occupational and specialized environmental health specialists.

A significant issue that needs to be addressed is the question of environmental monitoring. As of now, the entire responsibility has

been laid on the Department of Environment, including monitoring of drinking water quality. DOE is, at present, under-staffed and under-budgeted, making it an extremely unsuitable organisation to discharge its responsibilities adequately. DWASA and DPHE may be made responsible for monitoring drinking water quality, vehicular emission monitoring may be made the responsibility of BRTA while the Institute of Public Health may be made responsible for monitoring of food adulteration. Similarly, some of the private sector laboratories like the Dhaka University, BUET, BAEC, ICDDRB may be considered for conducting routine monitoring of ambient water and air.

#### ROLE OF PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR

There is specific role for both public and private sector when it comes to improving and protecting environmental health aspects in Bangladesh. These two sectors are to supplement and complement each other's activities. Private sector can very easily reach the grassroots level, which is very important. But this also needs the support of the public sector organizations. Activities of these two sectors should be well defined, organized and integrated to fulfill the common goal in terms of environmental health. As this is a small country with huge population and limited resources, people's active participation should be encouraged and widely used.