



## ***POPULATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT***

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### **Centre for Policy Dialogue**

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*The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), established in 1993, is an innovative initiative to promote an ongoing process of dialogue between the principal partners in the decision-making and implementing process. The dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. The Centre has already organised a series of such major dialogues at local, regional and national levels. These dialogues have brought together ministers, opposition frontbenchers, MPs, business leaders, NGOs, donors, professionals and other functional groups in civil society within a non-confrontational environment to promote focused discussions. The expectation of the CPD is to create a national policy consciousness where members of civil society will be made aware of critical policy issues affecting their lives and will come together in support of particular policy agendas which they feel are conducive to the well being of the country. The CPD has also organised a number of South Asian bilateral and regional dialogues as well as some international dialogues.*

*In support of the dialogue process the Centre is engaged in research programmes which are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research programmes of CPD include **The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), Governance and Development, Population and Sustainable Development, Trade Policy Analysis and Multilateral Trading System and Leadership Programme for the Youth**. The CPD also carries out periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and developmental concerns.*

*As was mentioned above, one of the major on going programmes of the CPD is entitled **Population and Sustainable Development**. The objective of this programme is to enhance national capacity to formulate and implement population and development policies and programmes in Bangladesh, and through close interaction with the various stakeholder groups, to promote advocacy on critical population related issues. The programme, supported by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), is scheduled to be implemented by the CPD between 1999 and 2002. Research studies to be taken up under this programme, inter alia, such issues as population dynamics and population momentum and their implications for education and health services, the nexus between population correlates, poverty and environment, impacts of urbanisation and slummisation, migration, implications of demographic momentum, ageing and the broad spectrum of issues covering human rights. The programme also includes organisation of workshops and dialogues at division and national levels as also holding of international thematic conferences.*

*As part of CPD's publication activities, a CPD Dialogue Report series is brought out in order to widely disseminate the summary of the discussions organised by the Centre. The present report contains the highlights of the dialogue held at the Centre for Policy Dialogue on February 18, 1999 to discuss the focus and work plan of the aforementioned CPD-UNFPA programme on **Population and Sustainable Development**.*

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**Dialogue on  
CPD-UNFPA Study on Population and Sustainable Development**

**i) The Dialogue**

A dialogue was held on February 18, 1999 at the CPD Conference Room to discuss *focus* and *work plan* of the CPD-UNFPA study on ***Population and Sustainable Development***. This report contains the summary discussion of the *First Dialogue* held on the above mentioned study. Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman, CPD, initiated the Dialogue by elaborating on the objectives and focus of the UNFPA project. He put on the table the set of issues which were to be addressed under the study - population dynamics, the nexus between population correlates and poverty and environment, human rights, urbanisation, and migration. Professor Sobhan mentioned that the objectives of the project were three-fold: (a) to conduct research on issues related to population and family planning; (b) to stimulate policy advocacy and policy influencing in areas related to population policies and (c) to raise awareness about related issues amongst stakeholders and to stimulate policy debate by civil society through an elaborate programme of dissemination. The aim of this particular dialogue, the first one, was to discuss: (a) design of the project, (b) identify the areas of focus for the year 1999 and (c) identify resource-persons to be invited to collaborate in preparation of the papers.

**ii) Discussion**

Taking part in the discussion Professor M. Ataharul Islam, Department of Statistics, University of Dhaka mentioned that according to the project proposal in total 7 studies/papers were to be prepared in a year. These studies were supposed to be based on primary data, secondary data and literature review. Since the project is already 8 months behind schedule one would need to design a pretty rigid time frame for the year 1999. The schedule for particular studies would depend on the type of issues that are dealt with. Some of the studies would need to have a wider coverage in terms of focus. He stressed that case studies would not be suitable for recommending policy solutions. He thought that in order to look at linkages and quality of life issues, various data sets from the BBS, whilst helpful, would be difficult to combine. There was a need to generate comprehensive data sets. In absence of such data sets it would be very difficult to establish the required linkages. Prof. Islam also mentioned that some of the data was not available at disaggregated district levels. It was therefore necessary to find out how one would go about it. Prof. Atahar thought that one could also take an alternative approach to conducting these studies—instead of conducting several studies two or three substantive studies could be undertaken. Surveys at the national level could be conducted during the first year. Subsequently the information thus generated would serve as inputs for policy analyses in the subsequent years.

Commenting on Professor Atahar's observations Professor Sobhan said that CPD was not a full-scale research organisation and it did not have any significant comparative advantage in conducting full fledged research, CPD's comparative advantage lay in policy advocacy. A major objective of the project was to stimulate policy debate in Bangladesh. Whilst some primary investigations are to be undertaken, the studies will be mainly secondary evidence based, as was originally envisioned in the proposal document.

Professor Ataharul Islam at this point informed the participants that the proposal is based on ICBD '97. He agreed that most of the previous surveys did not make best use of the available data. Priority should also be given to alternate use of existing data. Professor Sobhan remarked that one would need to look at the linkages on the basis of available information and make an intelligent use of this information.

Taking part in the discussion Dr. Barkat-e-Khuda, Division Director, Health and Population Division, ICDDR'B said that he agreed with the opinion of Professor Sobhan and Professor Atahar. He also thought that a substantial part of the information required for most of the studies is already there. Researchers would be required to identify the gaps in data. Information which was lacking would need to be generated through primary surveys. He further thought that several workshops should be organised with participation of relevant academics, experts and officials as well as relevant organisations in order to identify the gaps in information. He thought that issue-specific task forces could be organised to deal with particular focus areas to facilitate this process.

Ms. Simeen Mahmud, Senior Research Fellow, BIDS mentioned that following the ICPD '94 a consensus has emerged as to the high relevance of population correlates in terms of designing development policies. She recommended that a thorough review of the available literature should be undertaken; she also supported a critical review of policies which have so far been undertaken and implemented in Bangladesh. She also noted that a more productive use of the BBS data base was necessary as well as possible. She underpinned the issue of data quality and cautioned that primary data generated for the studies ought to be of high quality and reliability.

Stressing the need to focus on frontier issues Dr. Khuda said that environmental issues should be given high priority in the study. In this regard Professor Sobhan enquired about likely resource persons who could be entrusted with the studies to be carried out under the project. Dr. Khuda informed that ICDDR'B has a project on environmental health. He further noted that the relationship between environment and population was two-fold. On the one hand, environmental factors affect population; on the other hand, population correlates influence environmental factors. He however thought that the ICDDR'B project has little relevance to the way CPD project is envisaged because the ICDDR'B project is about public health, and operationally public health deals with a different set of policy issues.

Taking part in the discussion Dr. Raifqul Huda Chaudhury, UNFPA, Nepal thought that economists had little expertise at the micro level in terms of establishing linkages between population and development. He mentioned about studies conducted by Australian population economists who failed to establish direct linkages between population growth and various aspects of economic development. He argued that it was very critical to have been able to document what policies were designed, how these were implemented and the impact of such policies in the Bangladesh context etc. on the basis of published information. He thought that bringing such information to the domain of public attention and making it part of the policy discourse to be undertaken by the civil society was not an insignificant achievement. He pointed out that in case of Philippines and Nepal population growth was a critical factor contributing to deforestation; government policies also induce such negative outcome through increasing commercialisation of the economy.

Professor Sobhan opined that two sets of problems needed to be addressed: (a) which of the multidimensional sets of questions related to the broad area of population discourse could be addressed in the light of available information, and (b) to what extent the research questions needed to be modified in the light of the policy debate. He thought that there were two options in cases when relevant data was absent: either such data would have to be generated or the research questions would have to be modified. He commented that in Bangladesh most of the policies originated in an environment of information scarcity. He thought that the following questions were required to be address:

*What are the broad concerns?*

*What policies are to be put on the table?*

*How the studies should be structured?*

Professor Sobhan thought that one would first need to find out what sort of work could be done with the available information and available expertise. He further thought that the existing studies did not cover the experiences of the population policy programmes, and paid insufficient attention to the need for redirection of population policy in Bangladesh.

Dr. Rafiq informed the meeting that in Central Asia user charges have been introduced in the health service as a result of aid conditionalities under structural adjustment facilities. Life expectancy in these countries has gone down and abortion rate has increased significantly. Number of people below poverty line has also increased significantly. Dr. Rafiq further argued that the conventional wisdom about the population policy is that it is a reducing policy. But there are certain countries in the world where it was proved to be a misplaced policy. He thought that issues such as urbanisation should be included in the discussion on population and development.

Professor Sobhan thought that one important aspect of urbanisation in Bangladesh is women's entry into the labour force in an increasing number. This has resulted in the delay of the age of marriage. As a policy proposition this should be looked at from fertility behaviour angle. In the ready made garment (RMG) sector women aged between 14 to 21 years are the largest segment of the working force. This has important implications in terms of fertility of these women. He enquired whether anyone had a satisfactory answer to the question of changing nature of fertility as a result of the late marriage of women. Taking part in the discussion Dr. Rafiq proposed that such issues be looked at from a different perspective. In the Tamilnadu and Kerala states of India, as also in Sri Lanka, education was free and the enrolment ratio was almost 100%. There was increasing delay in the age of marriage in these regions. However, experience shows that the age at marriage must increase beyond 19 years in order for this to have any significant demographic impact. There were also problems involved with the increase in the delayed age of marriage. This may be associated with having sex before marriage leading to an increase in the trend of HIV infection. These factors need to be taken cognisance of.

Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Senior Research Fellow, BIDS thought that a framework needed to be established to find out the interlinkages between the population correlates. He suggested that at the initial stage an exercise should be undertaken to identify the existing gaps in the research. He noted that there was a serious problem in establishing relationships between different sets of data.

Professor Sobhan enquired about what should be considered as the most urgent policy issues in Bangladesh in this area. Such identification would help define the sets of problems to be addressed under the study. This would also enable the study to fruitfully contribute to the policy debate. Dr. Rafiq mentioned that quality of health care was an important issue to look at. Ms. Simeen Mahmud thought that the issue of maternal mortality called for special attention. Prof. Islam supported her and mentioned that child mortality was also an important issue. Dr. Bhattacharya thought that although the issues mentioned were of high priority these were mostly conventional ones. He thought that the study should also focus its attention on non-conventional issues such as population and employment. Professor Islam proposed that a conceptualisation workshop should be organised to identify the issues to be addressed under the study. The research papers for this workshop should be of a general thematic character that would cover some of the major issues, and focus on the state of knowledge pertaining to such issues. Dr. Khuda agreed with this proposal. He thought that the objective of the study was not to go for estimation but to look at the policies and interventions. He further mentioned about arranging an umbrella dialogue and then subsequently arrive at the major issues. Studies would then be taken up to address those issues and initiate the policy debate and discourse. All the participants of the meeting agreed to this proposal.

It was decided to hold a national workshop on the broad theme of Population and Development in the third week of April. Three state of the art papers would be presented at this workshop. Professor Ataharul Islam was assigned to write a paper on ***Population and Sustainable Development***; Dr. Barkat-e-Khuda was requested to write a paper on ***Population, Health and Environment*** and Professr Nazrul Islam will be requested to write a paper on ***Population, Urbanisation and Migration***. The workshop will also enable the team to identify the issues which will be subsequently taken up for investigation.

**List of Participants**  
*(in alphabetical order)*

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| Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya                         | Senior Research Fellow, BIDS  |
| Dr. Rafiqul Huda Chaudhury                         | UNFPA, Nepal  |
| Prof. Ataharul Islam                               | Dhaka University  |
| Dr. Barkat-e-Khuda                                 | Division Director, Health and<br>Population Division, ICDDR,B,<br>Dhaka |
| Ms. Simeen Mahmud                                  | Senior Research Fellow, BIDS  |
| Prof. Mustafizur Rahman                            | Research Director, CPD  |
| Prof. Rehman Sobhan<br>(Moderator of the dialogue) | Executive Chairman, CPD   |