



**POPULATION AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT:  
SELECTED ISSUES OF GREATER CHITTAGONG**

**Report No. 28**

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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 Chittagong Institute of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), on May 6, 2000. The dialogue was organised by the CPD in association with the Department of Economics, Chittagong University on the theme of **Population and Sustainable DevelopmentL Selected Issues of Greater Chittagong** under the aforementioned CPD-UNFPA programme on **Population and Sustainable Development**.*

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*Dialogue on*  
**Population and Sustainable Development:  
Selected Issues of Greater Chittagong**

**i) The Dialogue**

The Centre for Policy Dialogue, in association with the Department of Economics, University of Chittagong, organised a Local Level dialogue on the theme of ***Population and Sustainable Development: Selected issues of Greater Chittagong***. The dialogue, held under the aegis of the CPD - UNFPA programme on **Population and Sustainable Development**, took place in the city of Chittagong at the Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB), on May 6, 2000. With the Pro-Vice Chancellor of the University of Chittagong, Dr. Abu Yousuf, as the chief guest, the inaugural session of the dialogue was chaired by Professor Md. Saleh Uddin, Chairman, Department of Economics, Chittagong University (CU). The inaugural session was also addressed by Professor Mustafizur Rahman, Research Director, CPD. Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director, CPD chaired the business session and acted as moderator at the dialogue. Among those taking part at the dialogue were academics, government officials, NGO representatives, researchers and a large number of students (list of participants is annexed). Two background papers were presented at the dialogue. Dr. Jyoti Prakash Dutta, Professor, Department of Economics, CU, presented the first paper on the theme of *Impact of Development Programme on Environment and Demographic Phenomena of Ethnic Minorities of Chittagong*. While Dr. Irshad Kamal Khan, Associate Professor of Department of Economics, University of Chittagong, presented the second paper on the subject of *Socio-economic Profile of Sex Workers of Chittagong*. Both the papers were commented upon by designated discussants. The keynote presentations were followed by a candid and open discussion in which a large number of participants took an active part.

**Session I**

**ii) Resume of Keynote Presentation by Dr Jyoti Prakash Dutta,**

During the first session of the dialogue Dr Jyoti Prakash Dutta, Professor, Department of Economics, CU, in his paper, *Impact of Development Programme on Environment and Demographic Phenomena of Ethnic Minorities of Chittagong*, reviewed the cumulative impact of major development projects undertaken in Chittagong during the period between the early 1960s and the conclusion of the peace accord between the Bangladesh and the tribal insurgents in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in 1997. Whilst focusing on natural environment, demographic phenomena and the quality of life of the ethnic minorities in the region, Professor Dutta also drew attention to the way in which these broad parameters interacted with each other and subsequently influenced the process of overall development.

The author made note of his concern about the various questions relating to the environment, demographic phenomena and the quality of life of hill people by emphasising that a sizeable segment of population, fortified by good standard of living, was necessary for maintaining the environmental and ecological balance of the Chittagong region. He was of the view that such concerns should receive priority attention since Chittagong region alone formed the single largest forest area of Bangladesh, the Sustenance of the delicate ecological balance of the region was of crucial importance for ensuring sustainable development of the country.

While discussing the environmental impact of development programmes, Dutta asserted that projects such as Karnaphuli Multipurpose Project, monospecies plantation, horticulture and fruit gardening, rehabilitation and resettlement programmes, etc. not only affected the environment adversely but also caused irreversible natural resource loss in the areas under scrutiny.

Dr. Dutta informed the dialogue participants that the Karnaphuli Multipurpose Project had been undertaken with the core objectives of power generation, irrigation, flood control, enhancement of navigability of the rivers, pisciculture, et cetera. Since the project had been implemented without any Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) being carried out, it had adversely affected the socio-economic conditions of a large segment of the population of Chittagong as well as the flora and fauna of the region.

Dr Dutta noted that Kaptai Lake, an artificial reservoir built under the project, had caused huge areas of arable land, dwelling places of local people, forest areas and many civil establishments of Chittagong to submerge. The lake had resulted in unfathomable loss to tribal people in terms of property, loss that was never compensated for by subsequent rehabilitation programmes adopted by successive governments.

The impact of the Karnaphuli Multipurpose Project on the environment turned out to be of a diverse nature. Grave assault was made on the forest resources of the region, the consequence being a severe lashing of the bio-diversity and ecosystem of the area. There occurred large-scale deforestation, particularly in reserved and unclassed state forests (USF) owing to the construction of the dam and reservoir, roads and other infrastructural facilities. In addition, human settlements were displaced by the dam. Moreover, relatively easy accesses to the resources of hitherto water transport also contributed to rampant deforestation. This large-scale deforestation, in turn, played a not insignificant role in reducing the volume of rainfall in the region and causing a decline in fish production.

Dr Dutta remained critical about the negative environmental impact caused by the monospecies plantation programme. The project, despite having gained wide popularity owing to its potential supply of high quality timber in the region, left clear bruises on the land, forest and environment of Chittagong in a significant way. Teak plantation, it was noted, requires clear felling and burning of natural forests and thus demands more nutrition for the soil. However, a continuing rotation of the same species on the same sites have caused a deterioration in the organic matter of soil and thereby destroyed the

ground flora. As a corrective measure, said the author, a Natural Regeneration Plot (NRP) system had been developed in Chittagong to guard against soil degradation by teak monoculture.

Regarding the environmental impact of Horticulture Development Program initiated in 1968-69 with the aim of creating fruit gardens on a commercial basis to rehabilitate some tribal families, Dr Dutta pointed out that in spite of being successful initially, the whole program of horticulture development had ultimately slowed down, ending finally in an enhanced state of soil erosion and deforestation of a large number of areas around Kaptai Reservoir. Another program, Joint Horticulture Farm, undertaken by Chittagong Hill Tract Development Board (CHTDB) in 1976 to rehabilitate a good number of *Jhumia* landless families, had also collapsed, resulting in, apart from financial losses, deforestation and consequent soil erosion.

Focusing on the overall development programmes of Chittagong and their impact on development, Dutta drew attention to two of the eleven components which comprised the Chittagong Development Project financed by the Asian Development Bank (ADB). The first component, Upland Settlement Project, covers the settlement of some landless *Jhumia* families and creation of rubber and fruit gardens on hilly lands, while the second component deals with afforestation and rehabilitation programmes. Although creation of rubber and fruit gardens and afforestation programmes had made significant progress, the settlement programmes, like all other previous rehabilitation and settlement programmes, had failed after causing damage to several thousand acres of forests, thereby leading to environmental degradation. Dr Jyoti Dutta further mentioned another two additional projects undertaken by CHTDB in 1992, the aims of which related to helping an agricultural technology suitable for hilly areas to evolve and develop an economically and environmentally sound mountain ecosystem. The projects, Sloping Agricultural Land Technology (SALT) and Appropriate Technologies for Soil Conserving Farming System (ATSCFS), in time left a poor impact on the overall agriculture patterns of Chittagong.

Substantiating his analysis of environmental degradation, Dutta referred to expert opinion as expressed at a national workshop in Rangamati on the development experience in the hill districts of Bangladesh. According to the experts, the overall bio-diversity, ecosystem and resource base of Chittagong had degraded substantially over the preceding three decades even as major development programmes in the region had been undertaken without EIA. The experts, said the speaker, had recommended that development programmes be launched in future through having EIA prior to final approval. The UNDP, it was noted, had initiated a program of holding workshops in Chittagong in order to sensitize the public to the issues pertaining to sustainable development and finally to the need for a formulation of an action plan in this regard.

To analyse the impact of development programmes on demographic phenomena in Chittagong, the major characteristics of tribal population that the author considered significant were age and sex composition, marital, occupational and educational status, population growth, fertility and mortality levels, reproduction rate and crude birth rate. Although the author observed similarities between the average size of households in

Chittagong and the national averages (a modal size of 5 in both the cases), he found the percentage of economically active population in Chittagong to be much higher than that of other parts of Bangladesh. Educational performance among the hill population was also observed to be quite satisfactory.

The author, in his research, noted that the relatively high levels of some of the important demographic indicators, such as Total Fertility Rate (TFR), Crude Birth Rate (CBR), Crude Death Rate (CDR), Natural Growth Rate (NGR) and Gross Reproduction Rate, were indicative of a growing population in the region. The author feared that in Chittagong, where arable land was quite scarce and where any form of land-based activities resulted in erosion and degradation of soil fertility, an expansion of population would only cause additional damage to the natural environment. Therefore, he advocated an enhanced level of public investment in family planning and social welfare in order for TFR and NGR to be substantially reduced and the size of population of Chittagong to be kept to a level the environment could support and sustain.

The author evaluated the living standards of the tribal people on the basis of data on monthly income and expenditure, living and economic conditions in terms of food sufficiency, types of houses, ownership of livestock and access to institutional credit as proxy variables. The author observed landlessness to be more acute in Chittagong and belied the general impression that tribal households preferred having plenty of land.

Dr. Dutta found the general health conditions of the ethnic minorities of Chittagong to be of an extremely poor quality --- and that despite the presence of twenty-two Thana Health Complexes in Chittagong for one million people. He observed that the tribal people were still dependent on local unhygienic methods for curing their ailments, because of a lack of awareness and persistent financial hardship.

Dutta also noted that maternal health care conditions in Chittagong were grim, again owing to an absence of awareness. Besides, financial drawbacks, non-availability of vaccines and other good maternity services contributed to a worsening of conditions in the region. With regard to the adoption of family planning measures, the percentage was observed to be lower than the national average. However, the overall state of health of children appeared to be better than that of their mothers. Though the use of colostrum was observed to be not very widespread. Most households were reported to be inclined to immunising their children. A few, though, suffered through having night blindness.

Considering the availability of pure drinking water and toilet facilities as the proxy variables for measuring the health condition of a population, the author found the ethnic minorities lagging much behind the average state of rural Bangladesh. He concluded, that the average consciousness of tribal people about the requirements for maintaining good health was alarmingly poor in Chittagong.

Drawing his presentation to a close, Dr. Dutta identified the absence of *Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA)* during the implementation phase of the development projects as the key variable responsible for the negative impact on the

natural environment of the area. Dr. Dutta asserted that as a consequence of political unrest in the area over a long stretch of time, most development interventions had been directed primarily at resolving political problems through economic means. The author added that since the development projects were politically motivated, any kind of development intervention was considered by the ethnic minorities as a form of aggression against their very existence. Such feelings of alienation subsequently helped to accelerate the process of their migration to India. Therefore, the development programmes pursued in the area were in effect a variation of counter-insurgency program and this basically contributed to environmental degradation through deforestation and a waste of public funds. The author added that these projects therefore could not impact on the demographic characteristics and processes and also the quality of life of the ethnic minorities to the extent warranted by the sustainability of development of the region. Finally, the author stressed the significance of the questions of sustainability and people's participation which are more pronounced in an area such as Chittagong as the natural environment and the demographic characteristics of the population of the area were more susceptible to any kind of development intervention compared to those of the rest of the country.

### **iii) Comments by Designated Discussants**

#### ***Comments by Dr Sirajul Haque, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Chittagong***

Dr. Sirajul Haque, who initiated the discussion, focused on two main aspects of the paper presented by Dr. Jyoti Prakash Dutta. The first aspect covered the environmental consequences following the inception of development projects in the Hill districts. The second aspect dealt with the analysis of different socio-economic indicators to assess the outcome of those projects. Referring to the varied degree of environmental and socio-economic impact of the development projects as presented in the paper, Dr. Haque appreciated the findings of Dr. Dutta's research studies. He agreed with Dutta that most of the projects had been ill planned and ill implemented. He was of the opinion that a lack of efficient management and a failure to successfully implement the development projects were the variables causing environmental degradation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

Dr. Haque recommended that since the paper covered such socio-economic issues as health, sanitation, income and expenditure, the title of the paper should be changed to *Impact of Development Programmes on Environment and Socio-economic Phenomena of the Ethnic Minorities of Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT)*.

With regard to the sample size of the research, Dr. Haque considered the size used in the research as unnecessarily large. He advocated application of easy methods of data generation through a use of stratified random sampling techniques.

He enquired of the author whether it was appropriate to evaluate the environmental effects of different development projects without considering the tangible

and non-tangible economic benefits resulting from these projects. According to him, the evaluation of a development project would be more meaningful if the cost-benefit analysis were carried out. Furthermore, he wanted to know how the author identified the effects of the development projects. He recommended that development projects in the CHT be planned and implemented only after an Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) had been carried out. Dr. Haque concluded his part of the discussion congratulating Dr. Dutta for his extensive work and laying stress on more research on such vital issues.

***Comments by Dr Abul Hasnat Golam Quddus, Professor, Department of Economics, University of Chittagong***

Dr. Quddus set out with an appreciation of the sample size of the research. Commenting on the sampling techniques, he advised the author to include in the paper a clear indication of the methods of drawing samples, the confidence level, the accuracy level, et cetera. He appreciated the author on his use of secondary data in the research. Referring to the overall objectives of the Karnaphuli Multipurpose Project, he agreed in principle with the author that such projects had a detrimental environmental and socio-economic impact on ethnic minorities. He mentioned that during the period of project implementation, planners had ignored the sentiments of the local community as well as their attitudes towards the project. He asserted that the project had been wrongly conceived from the beginning and had been targeted to electrify Dhaka or Chittagong at the cost of tribal people. He advocated integrating people's participation in the process of project implementation.

Focusing on the environmental consequences caused by the mono-species plantation programme, Dr. Quddus informed the participants about the disastrous environmental impact caused by trees such as the eucalyptus. He noted that the excessive surface water absorption capacity of the eucalyptus led to widespread of environmental degradation. He suggested that environmentally friendly projects be undertaken and noted that ignorance and lack of knowledge were the key variables behind the detrimental consequences of environment-related programmes.

Regarding the horticulture programmes in Chittagong Hill Tracts undertaken in the pre-independence era, Dr. Quddus mentioned that he had found no indication in the present paper about the land leasing methods exercised in the Hill districts. Referring to his personal experience of two villages in Rangunia thana, he said that the short term land leases induced the inhabitants to base their plantation programmes on trees of a shorter life cycle, such as ginger and vegetables, which cause a great degree of soil erosion along the slopes of hills. On the other hand, long term leases attracted the lessees towards planting trees of a comparatively longer life cycle. Such trees have a favourable impact on the environment. Therefore, he concluded that inappropriate land leasing methods, not poor management of the programmes, was one of the foremost reasons behind environmental degradation and the failure of the horticulture programmes in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.



Speaking on projects which were undertaken after the emergence of Bangladesh, Dr. Quddus agreed with the keynote speaker that most of the programmes introduced during the period of the insurgency had failed primarily because of the political motivation behind them. The purpose behind the projects was to dampen the ongoing insurgency by pouring money into development projects in the mistaken belief that once the region was developed, there would be no feeling of deprivation among the tribal people.

Dr. Quddus pointed out that the Karnaphuli multipurpose and horticulture projects had nothing to do with the tribal insurgency as both projects had been set into motion prior to the outbreak of the conflict. Therefore, both of these projects failed owing to a lack of understanding of the Hill people's needs, desires and wishes and the ignorance of planners about the likely damage to the environment. He added that in the Sixties and early Seventies, planners also remained unaware of environmental impact as a result of which no environmental impact assessment was conducted. With regard to the socio-economic conditions of ethnic minorities, he appreciated the survey because of its portrayal, on most counts, of the tribal population as not being much behind the plainlanders.

Dr. Quddus recommended that the analysis would have been more appropriate and meaningful if the author had developed a hypothesis and used "insurgency" as an independent variable, "consequences" as dependent variable and "intervention" as the intervening variable to prove or disprove the hypothesis.

#### **iv) Discussion**

Following the brief discussions by the designated discussants, Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya invited the participants to share their thoughts and views pertaining to the paper presented by Dr. Jyoti Dutta. Such issues as environmental degradation, socio-economic conditions of the local inhabitants, cost and benefit of the development projects, planning and implementation of the projects and their social, economic and political aspects were covered during the open discussion. The following sections briefly describe the issue-wise comments and opinions placed by the different participants.

#### ***Environmental Degradation***

The question of development vis-à-vis projects-driven environmental degradation in the Hill Tracts emerged as one of the main issues of debate. Professor Alamgir Serajuddin, former Vice Chancellor, CU first raised the point of correctly defining the term "environment". He stressed the need to accurately define "environment" from the broader perspective of the Hill Tracts. He claimed that the concept of the environment conveyed different meanings at different places of the country.

Describing environmental degradation as a secular problem, Professor Abul Kalam Azad of CU, requested the author of the paper not to concentrate only on the effects of the environment on certain groups of people. He argued that since

environmental degradation affected everybody irrespective of their social class, cast and ethnicity, its effects ought not to be illustrated from a narrow perspective. Moreover, he pointed out that a particular area should not be held responsible for natural calamities. There are other regions, both within and beyond the frontiers of the country, where environmental degradation is continuously and systematically taking place.

Dr. Belayet Hossain from CU, in his remarks, asked the author to measure the magnitude of environmental degradation caused by different development projects in the environmental region. He also asked the participants to focus their attention on how such degradation could be reduced.

Mentioning the causes of such phenomena, Dr. Hamida Banu from Physics Department, CU pointed to the Bengali settlements as a prime reason for environmental degradation in the region. Describing her personal experience, she said that the living style of the resettled Bengalis was relatively unhygienic compared to that of the local ethnic minorities. Their dealings with the local people, in addition to their lifestyle, was also a great factor behind environmental pollution, she noted.

### ***Socio-economic Conditions***

During the open discussion, the participants shared their knowledge regarding the socio-economic conditions of different classes of people in the Hill districts. Professor Alamgir Serajuddin, Former Vice Chancellor, CU noted the cultural and social divide between the people of the Hill Tracts and those of other areas of the country. The people in the plains regard ethnic minorities as distinct and separate, both socially and culturally. He underscored the need for bridging such social gaps by absorbing the people of the Hill districts in different government and private organisations. He questioned the logic of measuring the living and social conditions of both groups of people under the same guiding principles. In his view, the needs and necessities of the hilly people were quite at variance with those of people from the plains. He stressed the need for forming a *Chittagong Hill Tracts Studies Institute* to conduct multidimensional research studies on the social standing of the ethnic minorities.

Dr. Preeti Barua, Department of Political Science, CU noting that social discrimination also prevailed within the ethnic groups of the Hill districts, informed the participants that certain ethnic groups such as the Chakmas were more educated and consequently reaped more benefits than other ethnic groups. This was obvious from the advantages they derived from the various development projects in the Hills.

Calling the ethnic minorities the poorest section of the country, Professor Sekander Hayat Khan, Project Director, Rangamati University of Science and Technology, stated that the resource balance was not actually "balanced" in the hilly regions but instead leaned considerably toward the richer sections. He opined that the distribution of land as well as income was very much skewed in favour of the richer section of the community. He stated that consistency in distribution of compensation was a must for development projects to be beneficial for the entire community. On the other

hand, referring to the lower child-woman ratio and higher fertility rate in the Hill districts, he said that the higher child death rate might be the cause behind such phenomena.

Moreover, Khan spotted similarities between comparable classes of both the plains and the Hill districts in terms of lack of available sanitation facilities, non-availability of pure drinking water and other social necessities. Therefore, whether the deprivation and lack of resources of ethnic minorities developed from the inception of the development projects remained a controversial issue.

With regard to the higher birth rate in the Hill tracts, Dr. Hamida Banu found a contradiction in Dr. Dutta's paper. She said that in the Hills, females were more socially active than males. From a sociological point of view, it is expected that the birth rate in the hilly regions should be lower as the females keep themselves busy in social activities. But the paper, said Banu, presented an opposite view. Dr. Banu explained that the lack of available recreation facilities of the males and the increasing tempo of migration might be the reasons behind such increased birth rate in the Hills.

Dr. Banu placed emphasis on improving the economic standing of ethnic minorities through involving them in productive activities such as pisciculture and food processing. She opined that the government as well as NGOs should come forth with more funds in the interest of the welfare of the target groups of the Hill Tracts.

### ***Cost and Benefit of the Projects***

Professor Abul Kalam Azad of Department of Economics, CU emphasised on the need for appropriate measurement of the cost and benefits of the development projects. He observed that this should be undertaken from a macro perspective and not from the perspective of a particular area. With some classic examples, he explained that environmental degradation and other forms of negative developmental impact were customary for any development project. Projects, in his opinion, ought to be undertaken only if the benefits outweighed the costs in all respects. By such standards, all benefits and shortcomings accruing to the entire population should be taken into account in the cost-benefit analysis. He gave due importance to providing adequate compensation to the affected people.

Professor Saleh Uddin, Department of Economics, CU expressed views similar to those of Professor Abul Kalam Azad regarding the cost and benefit of the development projects. His opinion was that no development project could be undertaken without any detrimental impact on the environment.

### ***Planning and Implementation of the Projects***

Professor Sekander Hayat Khan, Project Director, Rangamati Institute of Science and Technology, considered faulty planning and improper implementation to be the cause of the collapse of development projects. During the planning phase, there was no effort

made towards sharing the views of local people and integrating people's participation in the process of implementation. He stressed that unless the planners took into account popular feelings and thoughts in the process, the overall objective of the development projects would be jeopardised. In a similar vein, Dr. Hamida Banu argued that a development project could not be fully successful unless it became the focal point of life.

### ***Political Aspects***

In the discussion, Professor Preeti Barua attempted to sort out a linkage among the social, economic and political aspects of the debate. She thought the entire problem had emerged from an ethnic origin. Since the days of British colonialism, the ethnic groups kept themselves separate from the rest of the population of the country in their thoughts, way of life, cultural and social standing. Such sub-national feelings subsequently propelled them towards the *Janashanghati Samity*, popularly known as *Shanti Bahini*. Political, social and economic depression encouraged them to go for the creation of such an organisation, which eventually was to launch an armed insurgency in the Hill Tracts. Barua stressed deciphering the cause and effect relationship between the insurgency problem and the political and socio-economic aspects of the issue. In relation to the political aspect, Professor Barua claimed that the motivation towards such insurgency had developed from the rehabilitation as well as resettlement problems created by the Kaptai Dam in the late 1960s.

### ***Remarks by Dr Debapriya Bhattacharya, Executive Director, CPD***

Following the open discussion, Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya highlighted the major findings of the dialogue, summarized as follows:

- At the dialogue, the participants dwelt on a community of people who were economically marginalised, socially excluded and environmentally vulnerable.
- In the discussion, a contradiction was noticeable regarding the sample size of the research. One of the participants had viewed it to be unnecessarily large and had advocated using stratified sampling techniques to ease the process of collecting data. On the other hand, another participant considered the sample size to be relatively small and adequate.
- There was no clear indication in the debate about the analytical approach to be followed in order to derive the impact of development projects on the ethnic tribes. If the traditional “before-after” approach is followed, there will be some difficulty regarding the information to be collected because the question of memory recall is related to the issue. In such a case, only an one-year observation would be available which might lead to providing a static picture of the overall situation.
- The participants expressed their concern about whether the entire issue was related only to the ethnic minorities or the community as a whole. They argued that the problem would not have arisen if there had been a control group analysis.

- All the problems discussed at the dialogue can be grouped under “call attribution problems”. Although all problems originated from the six development projects, it was not clear which of the projects had contributed the lion’s share. A complete picture would not be available unless there was any “before-after” analysis and comparison of the results with the national averages.
- There should be more focus on the chain of intervening variables and intra-ethnic dimensions in order to analyse the issue from a broader perspective.
- The participants agreed in principle that the earlier research literatures should be weighted for adding more values to the present study and drawing out more information about such an unexplored issue.
- The property rights issue should be given due importance in the settlement of land-related disputes. To enhance productivity and long-term growth in the region, there should be transparency and predictability regarding the issue in order to minimize conflicts between groups.
- People’s participation needs to be integrated in the process of designing, implementing, evaluating and monitoring development projects to reap the most benefits. During the discussion, the absence of the participation aspect had been highlighted as a major cause aback the failure of the development projects.
- The participants concluded that the *Environmental Impact Analysis* (EIA) should be integrated into the implementation phase of the development projects. They deemed it to be crucial for the socio-economic development of ethnic minorities as well as other groups of people living in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

## Session II

### v) **Resume of Keynote presentation by Dr Irshad Kamal Khan**

The second session of the dialogue was occasioned for Dr Irshad Kamal Khan, Associate Professor, Department of Economics, CU, to present his paper, *Socio-Economic Profile of Sex Workers of Chittagong*. Dr. Khan’s concern related to the urban-centred population of sex workers who are physically visible but socially hidden. Sex workers, contended Khan, represented a crucial aspect of Bangladesh society and by the very nature of their work were symbolic of some serious social problems in the context of impending STD/HIV epidemics as also the subculture linked to issues of drug abuse and sex-related crimes generally associated with such sections of the population.

In his study Dr Khan attempted to present a socio-economic profile of sex workers on the basis of information generated through field survey undertaken for the

study. Basing his studies on extensive research on the age distribution, marital status, religion, literacy and academic status of sex workers as well as their parents' occupational background, their living and housing conditions, the circumstances of their entrance into the sex industry and their experience and previous occupation, Dr. Khan broadened the canvas and drew his conclusions on the basis of the extent of sex workers' incomes and expenditures, the nature of sex worker activities, including the role of pimps, background of the clients, criminal association, nature of recreational activities, et al. He highlighted such sensitive issues as the health conditions of the sex workers, including incidence of STD and took into account sex workers' awareness about sex-related social problems and AIDS/HIV. Dr. Khan also dwelt on the sex workers' own perception about their profession and the rehabilitation initiatives undertaken by the government.

The author drew attention to an important dimension of the problem, namely, the human rights of these sex workers, a subject which has received very intense attention in recent times. Describing the human rights situation among the sex workers population, Khan focused on such issues as the circumstances under which destitute people were forced to take to sex as a commercial activity and the sub-human conditions under which sex workers were compelled to live and operate. He made certain pertinent observations on the forcible eviction of sex workers by the government and the reported incidence of sex workers being denied normal burial rights after death. Dr Khan's opinion was that society could not remain indifferent to the violation of human rights constantly being inflicted on this community.

In the interest of consistency and in order to highlight the social importance and focus on a homogeneous group, the study took into consideration only floating female sex workers directly involved in offering sexual services on a commercial basis in Chittagong.

While discussing the findings and interpretation of the study, the author first raised the issue of individual and social background of the sex workers. It was found that though the average age of the sex workers was about 22 years, there was also a significant presence of child sex workers within the community. The study thereafter moved on to the question of the growth of the sex worker population, stressing the fact that the trend seemed to have become faster in recent years and the numbers appeared to be on the rise.

The study revealed that most sex workers were also married or had been married. Some had been abandoned by their husbands. But as far as family and kinship ties were concerned, sex workers lived as social outcasts with a minimal level of bonds and ties with their families. Birth rates among the sex workers seemed to be fairly low with a large proportion being childless, Khan noted.

The research made it clear that the respondents, having come from a social background typical of the most populous sections of the country, displayed a general

pattern of the predominance of illiteracy and lack of education among themselves. However, this pattern was not significantly worse than the national female illiteracy level. The number of orphaned sex workers is fairly high. The picture of living conditions of sex workers as drawn from various types of accommodation is plainly deplorable. Almost all the sex workers considered themselves permanent residents of Chittagong.

Emphasising the circumstances of entrance into sex industry, the author pointed out that sex workers did not engage themselves in the business immediately upon their arrival on the urban scene. With most sex workers having previously been either housemaids, housewives or garment workers, the author considered the community of sex workers basically not a self-generating one but rather one coming from all walks of life. He identified poverty, coercion, fraud, family discontent, mistakes and rape as the main reasons behind an entry into the profession. The *dalals* (pimps) played a major role in the initial recruitment of the sex workers, he asserted. Although poverty was identified as a prime factor behind the recruitment of sex workers, the incidence of rape was also observed to be a notable factor. Dr. Khan argued that in patriarchal societies, victims of rape were simply ostracised. And then came the feeling of guilt in the one fallen prey to rape. "I am a bad girl", said a sex worker who had been gang raped before she eventually entered the profession.

Regarding incomes and expenditures of sex workers, the paper cited the fact that though sex workers apparently had high average incomes in comparison to the poorest sections of society, they did not work all week. The main components of sex workers' daily expenses in order of importance were found to be food, clothing, cosmetics, entertainment, transport and house rent. They usually saved a little but for a very short duration.

Explaining the nature of sex worker activities, Dr Khan identified certain aspects as physical rest and sleep, watching movies and companionship as major leisure activities. In addition, the study revealed that many sex workers were known not by their real names but by the names of popular film actresses, a fact which indicated that watching movies played a significant role in the shaping of their social psyche. The author justified the fact by saying that the attitude accorded the women the desired anonymity and perhaps also the satisfaction of coming by some imaginary glamour by association.

The most frequently used places for the provision of sexual services were found to be clients' premises, hotels, train wagons, roadsides, abandoned and isolated places and neighbourhoods. Dr Irshad Khan also noted that in spite of some advantages of working with pimps, the majority of sex workers did not consider their presence necessary. They regarded police action against them and interference by local goons as major hindrances to sex activities. Sex workers were reported to be fairly acquainted with the experience of jail or police custody, a reality accepted as an inevitable though unpleasant part of life. The research revealed that the clients of the sex workers came from diverse social classes, educated as well as uneducated. Most clients, however, belonged to middle and lower income groups and were of middle and young age.

Drawing attention to the health conditions of sex workers, the author pointed out that they were compelled to live in subhuman conditions. Although nearly all sex workers claimed to use soap in daily showers, the water they used for drinking and bathing was marked by high levels of contamination. The level of human excreta discharge in open spaces appeared to be extremely dangerous. There was a significant lack of medical attention and dangerously high levels of the incidence of STD among the sex workers accompanied by the fact of inadequate treatment. The lower percentage regarding the adoption of birth control measures among the sex workers was a matter of social concern, the author opined. In this regard, he thought that male condoms had contributed to the success of family planning campaigns since these had been used voluntarily by the users in their own interest. But in the case of sex workers, since the clients felt little or no interest in using such devices, male condoms might not be effective devices for preventing unwanted pregnancies among sex workers. He thought that female condoms serve as the device of choice for sex workers both for preventing unwanted pregnancies and STD.

Regarding sex workers' awareness of sex-related social problems, the author revealed that although the majority of sex workers preferred using contraceptives, the use of the same by clients was irregular, with most sex workers reluctant to urge their clients to take recourse to such devices. Fewer than half of the sex workers were found to be unaware of the role of condoms in preventing STD. There was a widespread lack of knowledge among sex workers about the existence of means for the prevention of STD/AIDS, the author claimed. He had even stumbled on the discovery that most of the sex workers had never heard of AIDS.

Commenting on sex workers' perceptions about problems in the sex industry, Dr Irshad Khan said that although a majority of sex workers claimed to be satisfied with their present occupation, most of them preferred to switch to other occupations, given the opportunity. Responses to prospective rehabilitation initiatives were found to be very positive, but they resisted moves which did not take into account their own perceptions. In this respect, the author cited a court ruling which had declared the eviction of brothel inmates as unlawful. In the course of the research, sex workers were found to be disinclined towards their children taking up the same profession. Many indeed expressed a desire for their children to be educated. The report also identified a very high usage of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs in the sex industry.

On the basis of the findings, Dr Irshad Kamal Khan made some broad policy recommendations for addressing the issue pertaining to the sex worker population. He argued that the actual implementation of policy and a gradual evolution of practical programmes based on real experiences should be undertaken by forums which should be created from within the community at large where voluntary welfare organisations, grassroots institutions, human right organisations and NGOs could, indeed should, play a positive role in such initiatives.

The author also called for positive social action in the area of provision of medical attention for sex workers, especially in the treatment of STD which might warrant formulation of adequate public policies and implementation through mass participation



and NGO activities. He also emphasised the pressing need to educate sex workers on basic facts related to sex as also resultant sex-related problems. Dr. Khan recommended that social initiatives to rehabilitate sex workers into mainstream society through taking into account their sensitivities, preferences, inclinations and democratic participation in the decision making process at large be undertaken.

#### **vi) Comments by Designated Discussants**

##### ***Comments by Professor Nasir Uddin Ahmed, Department of Economics, University of Chittagong***

Professor Nasir Uddin Ahmed, initiating the discussion on the paper, appreciated Dr. Irshad Kamal's efforts in carrying out such extensive research on an issue which aroused strong sensitivities in society.

Professor Ahmed appreciated the author's outline of the major reasons behind the sex profession and noted that those reasons were also within the parameters of general perception. Adding his own views to those stated in the paper and explaining the issue from a political-economic perspective Dr. Ahmed drew attention to certain fundamental facts that might persuade a woman to choose this parties/or profession for her subsistence. Quoting the statistical facts mentioned in the paper, he reassured the participants that most of the sex workers were of rural origin, came from the lowest income groups and were illiterate. Describing the changing global socio-economic structure after the fall of the Soviet Union, the discussant said that capitalism had now emerged as the means of engineering the socio-economic structure on a global structure. In such a changed environment, indigent third world countries like Bangladesh were compelled to accept the newly adopted system and change their socio-economic structure accordingly. As the consequences of such a move, capital, labour and other factors of production were flowing out towards the resourceful regions from the disadvantaged ones. Therefore, the economic structure as well as the socio-economic condition of the rural lower income groups was in jeopardy.

Dwelling on the aftermath of such adverse conditions, the discussant said that the ever-changing economic system was compelling the rural people into searching for better employment opportunities in the cities with the expectation of higher standards of living. He especially focused on rural women, stating that they were forced to abandon their parenthood once they became destitute. But since there was no abundance of employment opportunities in the cities for the migrant women, some of them subsequently opted for prostitution as a means for their survival. The discussant agreed with the author that rural women did not become sex workers immediately on arrival in the city; they rather they became sex workers when they failed to find suitable jobs. He agreed in principle with the author that unless the social structure was changed, it would be difficult to draw the sex workers away from their profession.

Dr. Ahmed expressed his satisfaction as regards the sample size used in the research. However, he advised the author to include in the research the methods used for

collecting data. At the same time, he wondered as to how it was possible for five research assistants to conduct an extensive study within such a short period of time. He also raised queries about the contradictions between the rate of adoption of birth control measures and the rate of pregnancy among sex workers. Moreover, he counseled the author to keep the research free from any exterior bias factors.

Referring to the analysis on the child sex workers, Dr. Ahmed identified a conflict in the definition of “child” from the viewpoint of the sex industry. He said that although child sex workers were being treated as children, the surroundings in which they had been brought up did not hold them up as children. He asserted that in the sex industry, a girl attained maturity and a marriageable age when her menstrual period began.

The discussant was of the opinion that the information on the health issues of sex worker was very significant. Referring to the negative results found in the study about AIDS contamination in the sex industry of Chittagong, Dr. Ahmed said that one should not be complacent about the conclusion since the study covered only part of the country. He advocated research from a broader dimension in order to draw an overall conclusion about the AIDS issue in the country.

Mentioning the policy issues relating to betterment of the conditions of sex workers as recommended by the author in his paper, Dr. Ahmed thought that the suggestions was important, although he did not think it to be the best solution to the problem. He drew attention to the economic processes, which had got underway following the emergence of capitalism in the global economic arena and pointed out their negative consequences. Given such a situation there was a need for the government, to arm itself with strong political will and take the lead in wiping out the resultant social disequilibrium. Within a broad policy framework, the government should take necessary measures to broaden the scope of employment and educational facilities for rural women in order to help them avoid questionable subsistence. Undertaking separate programmes for each village, decentralisation of administration, electing honest and diligent local representatives and giving them authority to deal with the issues could be the possible steps to address the emergent problems. He also found the NGOs’ participatory approach to be effective and significant in resolving the issue.

## **vii) Discussion**

### ***The Underlying Causes of Prostitution***

The underlying causes of widespread prostitution can be viewed from different dimensions. Increasing poverty level is termed as one of the significant contributors to this emerging social problem. Dr. Hamida Banu thought that the prime reason which led to prostitution, was poverty which induced the poor women to choose this profession for her livelihood. She said that poor women in urban areas were being continuously victimised by their employers. As a result when they seek better employment opportunities, they are taken advantage of by *dalals* who force them to accept prostitution

as a profession. Since it was a one-way path, it was not possible for the poor women to fight their way back to normal and decent living. Dr. Banu emphasised that if the village women were given proper employment and society as a whole considered the issue with due importance, it was possible to discourage more women from entering the profession.

Ms. Esther Watts, an expatriate involved in social activities with a Chittagong-based NGO, CONCERN, added that poverty as well as social abuse worked as dominant factors which influence the pursuit of prostitution as a profession. Referring to practical experience, she said that most sexual workers had taken up the profession as a result of abused either by their fathers or husbands.

Making his contribution to the discussion, Dr. Hossain Kabir of the Department of Public Administration, CU pointed out that disproportionate property distribution laws also promoted prostitution. Referring to the discriminating property rights relating to women, Dr. Kabir advocated that laws regarding property distribution be amended to reduce social repression against women. If property distribution was made equal, such discrimination would be eliminated, he added. He stressed on the economic factors as the dominant causes behind prostitution.

According to Kamal Sen Gupta from Community Development Centre (CODEC), changing social attitudes towards women in the sex industry was essential towards bringing about reforms in the prevailing social system. He said that people were flocking to the urban areas with huge expectations about their future. However, the reality often fails to match their expectation. Attracted by various financial incentives, the struggling poor women are prone to take to prostitution. While describing his experience with an NGO in the coastal areas, he said that he had graduated to the view that micro-credit programmes should be designed in a way that would generate more employment, promote entrepreneurship skills and develop new technologies.

Zeroing in on both poverty and social abuse as overlapping factors, Dr. Khan agreed in principle with the comments the participants had made regarding the social causes behind the rising level of prostitution.

### ***Legal Status, Rules and Regulations***

In answer to a question on whether there was any value addition through the sex industry, Professor Saleh Uddin, Chairman, Department of Economics and Dean Social Sciences Faculty, CU, responded affirmatively. Mr. Sirajul Haque, Department of Economics, CU, quizzed the Professor Saleh Uddin on whether he thought the profession should be legalised. Replying to the question, Professor Saleh Uddin asserted that one had to accept the reality of the sex industry irrespective of the legal status or otherwise of the profession. Sex could not be made a commodity in a civilised society. But the truth was that in practice it did work as a commodity, he added. He blamed the community for such unwanted phenomena and advocated that no sex worker should be punished for her involvement in the profession.

Dr. Hussain Kabir from Department of Public Administration, CU, stressed that the government should initiate the introduction of a code of conduct and relevant rules and regulations to protect the industry from exploitation. He also raised the issue of difficulties in measuring the range of sex as a profession. He said there were many sex workers in Chittagong whom one could not recognise in the normal course of life. There were numerous hotels and unauthorized places where prostitution held away. Therefore, it would be a difficult job for a researcher to arrive at proper statistics on such socially hidden sex workers. The attendant difficulties in measurement considerably affected the conclusions reached in the survey, he asserted.

### ***Categorization of Sex Workers***

It was opined that sex workers could be categorized from different dimensions. With regard to such categorisation, Dr. Sirajul Haque asked the presenter why he had not differentiated between *floating* and *non-floating* sex workers for the purpose of greater authenticity. Replying to a question from one of the participants as to why there were so many non-Chittagong sex workers in the city, Dr. Khan said that a lower level of poverty in the port city might be an acceptable explanation. In reply, however, Dr. Khan said that he considered all sex workers as “floating” since there was no confined brothel in Chittagong.

Professor Hossain Kabir raised the dichotomy concerning voluntary and involuntary sex workers. He said that in developed countries, women came into this profession voluntarily, which was not the case in Bangladesh. In Bangladesh, women were pushed into the profession basically for economic and social reasons. Dr. Khan agreed with Professor Kabir, stating that there was hardly a single voluntary sex worker in Chittagong.

Describing the extent of the problem, Mr. Monsoor Khan from Chittagong Taxes Bar advocated for a confined place for the sex workers to prevent them from being subjected to widespread exploitation. Referring to the issue as an insoluble problem, he stressed on the need for looking at the issue beyond a religious point of view.

Along the same line Mr. Abu Bakar requested the presenter to go for a comparative study between *floating* and *non-floating* sex workers. He said that it would not be possible to determine the actual number of sex workers without taking both groups into consideration.

### ***Women and Child Trafficking***

Professor Jamal Nazrul Islam expressed his concerns about the issue of women and child trafficking to different countries from Bangladesh. Quoting findings from a UNICEF report, he noted that a million women and children had been sent out of this country to different regions of the world for dubious purposes. He added that in India, the Middle East and Southeast Asia, a number of poor Bangladeshi women and children had been

forced into prostitution. Recognising it as a global problem, he emphasised economic as well as other social factors as being relevant to this issue.

### ***Birth Control Measures Vs Unwanted Pregnancy***

A participant found in the report a contradiction between the low rate of unwanted pregnancy and the low level of adoption of birth control measures among the sex workers. Admitting the fact, Dr. Khan explained that the practice of unorthodox methods of sexual activities might explain such contradictions. Moreover, he added that some of the sex workers reduced their pregnancy rate by becoming infertile, voluntarily or otherwise. He concluded with a plea for more research to be carried out on such an unexplored issue.

### ***The Proposed Remedies***

The participants, through extensive sharing of views and ideas, agreed unanimously on certain means of arriving at solutions to the problem.

- Dr. Hamida Banu emphasised carrying out a field-level study on the clients of the sex industry. She viewed that identifying the overall social standing of the clients might point to the underlying causes of prostitution. She also drew attention to the need for providing sexual education to sex workers and preventing the inflow of village people into the cities.
- Professor Jamal Nazrul Islam advocated setting up male advisory committees in women's organisations so that a good relationship could be developed between the male members and the women workers. According to him, such measures would reduce the degree of vulnerability of the women workers. He put pressure on developing a congenial socio-economic environment that would raise the level of social commitment to the issue.
- Some participants recommended adopting proper rehabilitation measures to help the sex workers come out of the vicious circle.
- Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya focused on clarifying the definition of "sex industry". He said that although some sex workers had registered with the government, they still remained informal in the social setting. Dwelling on the extensive influence of both power and money in the industry, Dr. Bhattacharya placed high importance on having a broad public policy framework and universal civil codes to deal with the matter. He stated that devising a public policy framework was the first step towards dealing with the problem. He expected that the sex workers would achieve better bargaining power within an organised system as compared to one which was unorganised. He also focused on the urgency of providing adequate medical treatment to the sex workers. At the same time, he emphasised the need for incorporating sexual education in the general education system of the country so that

children could protect themselves from the negative implications of the global free information flows.

- To reduce the level of exploitation on repressed women, Dr. Bhattacharya urged the government to place before the Parliament an effective Act to embark violence against women. He emphasised that there should be somebody in the government to listen to the problems of the sex workers.
- Professor Saleh Uddin also urged the government to develop a public policy framework to protect such repressed classes from exploitation. He said that the government should restrict itself only on formulating the policy and not go beyond that.
- The participants gave due importance to the need for more comparative studies on the issue for uncovering the details of the problem. They emphasized the need to broaden knowledge on the subject through open discussions aimed at recognising the problem itself.

**List of Participants**

(In alphabetical order)

Mr. Nasiruddin Ahmad	Economics Department, Chittagong University
Mr. Jamir U. Ahmed	Centre for Development Service (CDS)
Dr. Abu Yusuf Alam	Pro-vice Chancellor, Chittagong University
Mr. Md. Lokmanul Alam	Institution of Engineers, Bangladesh (IEB) Chittagong
Mr. Ruhul Amin	Department of Public Administration, Chittagong University
Dr. A. K. Azad	Department of Economics, Chittagong University
Dr. N. H. M. Abu Bakar	Department of Philosophy, Chittagong University
Prof. Hamida Banu	Department of Physics, Chittagong University
Prof. B.P. Barua	Department of Political Science, Chittagong University
Ms. Kohinoor Begum	Baniful. S.W.O.
Dr. Debapriya Bhattacharya	Executive Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)
Mr. A. Kader Chowdhury	Centre for Development Service (CDS)
Mr. Prabir Das	Student, Chittagong University
Prof. Jyoti Prakash Dutta	Department of Economics, Chittagong University
Mr. Kamal Sen Gupta	Community Development Centre (CODEC)
Mr. Omar Haider	Department of Economics, Chittagong University
Dr. Muhammad Sirajul Haque	Department of Economics, Chittagong University
Mr. Md. Mozibul Hoque	Former Student, Chittagong University
Mr. Jakir Hossain	Research Associate, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)
Dr. Belayet Hossain	Department of Economics., Chittagong University
Mr. Md. Anwar Hossain	Integrated Social Development ISDE
Mr. Shamsul Hossain	Dy Curator, Chittagong University Museum
Dr. Jamal Nazrul Islam	Director, Research Centre for Mathematical and Physical Sciences (RCMPS), Chittagong University
Mr. A. K M. Khairul Islam	Chittagong University
Mr. Md. Nazrul Islam (Mannan)	Protyashi
Mr. Hossain Kabir	Department of Public Administration, Chittagong University
Md. Manzur Kader	Former Student, Chittagong University
Dr. Obaidul Karim	Department of Sociology, Chittagong University
Dr. Irshad Kamal Khan	Department of Economics, Chittagong University
Mr. Jasim Uddin Khan	Bangladesh Sangbad Sangstha (BSS)
Prof. M. Sekander Khan	Project Director, Rangamati University of Science & Technology

Mansoor Md. Khan	Chittagong Taxes Bar
Ms. Rasheda Khanam	Department of Management, Chittagong University
Ms. Dilruba Khanam	Department of Finance, Chittagong University .
Mr. A.K.M Golam Kibria	Association of Development Agencies of Bangladesh (ADAB)
Dr. Jiban Chandra Pal	Department of Statistics, Chittagong University
Mr. A.H.G. Quddus	Department of Sociology, Chittagong University
Prof. Mustafizur Rahman	Research Director, Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD)
Mr. M. Mafizur Rahman	Department of Economics, Chittagong University
Mr. Md. Akefur Rahman	YPSA
Mr. Manuar Rashid	Ghashful
Dr. Alamgir Serajuddin	Department of History, Chittagong University (former VC, CU)
Prof. Asma Serajuddin	Department of History, Chittagong University
Mr. Shahed Siddique	Bhorer Kagoj
Prof. B.S Tahera	Department of Economics, Chittagong University
Dr. Saleh Uddin	Chairman, Department of Economics, and Dean, Social Sciences Faculty, Chittagong University
Mr. Md. Sahid Ullah	Chairman, Department of Journalism, Chittagong University
Mr. Hamid Ullah	Daily Jugantar
Ms. Esther Watts	CONCERN