



উন্নয়ন অন্বেষণ
Unnayan Onneshan
The Innovators

centre for research and action on development

Bangladesh Public Health Conference 2008

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BRAC Inn, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Organized by Unnayan Onneshan

Report

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Bangladesh Public Health Conference 2008 organized by Unnayan Onneshan was held on June 13-14, 2008 at BRAC Inn conference hall, Mohakhali, Dhaka. The objective of the conference was to promote inquiry about existing health systems reforms, encourage newer models of pro-poor, equitable and efficient health care systems, and bring up the issues of climate change, legitimate use of drug and public-public participation in health care delivery system. Keeping the above said objective in mind six themes were formulated and focused in the conference. These are

- **Climate Change and its impact on health**
- **The role of the State in health care delivery**
- **Impact of essential service package on the poor**
- **Rational use of medicine**
- **Public-private partnership**
- **Public-public partnership**

Participants from DG Health Services; different donor agencies; national and international NGOs faculties and students of public health from various Universities; journalists and other stakeholders of public health were present in the conference. The conference was divided into six sessions to discuss all six themes and three of the sessions were held in each day of the two-day conference.

Opening Ceremony

Prof. Dr. Md. Abul Faez, honorable Director General, DGHS was present in the opening ceremony of the conference as Special Guest. Mr. Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, Chairman of Unnayan Onneshan said in his opening speech that State has to take the responsibility of proper and equitable health service for all citizen of the country. Allotment for health in national budget of last couple of years has been decreased. Health sector in Bangladesh is under tremendous threat due to influence of donors. Mr. Titumir accentuated public-public partnership in order to get rid of current situation. Prof. Dr. Abul Faez said in his speech that 50% of maternal and infant mortality can be reduced if proper use of available technology can be ensured. He pointed out weaknesses of the country in using new technology. Dr. Faez emphasized on proper delivery of service by ensuring full use of limited resource.

1st Session: Climate Change and its impact on health

Ist session of the 1st day of conference was chaired by Prof. Dr. Sheikh Aktar Ahmad, head of Occupational & Environmental Health, NIPSOM. The speakers of the session were Dr. M. H. Salim Ullah Sayed from NIPSOM, Dr. Hirendra Kumar Das, from UNDP, Dr. MD. Abdul Matin from Bangladesh Poribesh Andolon and Dr. Md. Yunus from ICDDR,B. The session focused on the current status of environmental degradation and health impact of climate change. The biophysical and ecological systems of the environment are fundamental to human health. Mounting human pressures on the environment are disrupting and depleting these systems. With the revolutionary changes in diagnosis of diseases, medication and treatment environmental health has emerged as focused agenda of the health issue. Health impact of climate-change, spread of arsenic, impact of rapid urbanization, hospital-refuges and industrial waste is jeopardizing the human life in Bangladesh. Findings indicated that the country is the most vulnerable to climate change due to its high climate variability, population density and inadequate institutional capacity. It was recommended in the session that Bangladesh should have clear mitigation policies for climate change as developed countries are causing the global warming. Dr. Salim Ullah Sayed mentioned that developing countries contribute 33% of green house gases whereas, developed countries contribute 67%.

Emphasis during the discussion was given on protecting the Ozone layer for survival of natural life. Ozone layer shields plant and animal life from ultraviolet radiation. Diarrhoea, skin diseases, malaria, kala-azar, mental disorder, dengue are major climate sensitive diseases in Bangladesh.

2nd Session: The role of the State in health care delivery

Main speakers of the session the role of the State in health care delivery were Tauhid Alam of UNFPA; Taslima Akter and Atia Afreen of TIB; Sayed Aminul Haq from Coast; Dr. Ferdous Arfina Osman, associate professor, department of Public Administration, Dhaka University; Dr. Manosh Chowdhury, associate professor of Anthropology in Jahangir Nagar University. The session was chaired by Prof. Dr. Shubhagata Chowdhury of BIRDEM. The session mainly discussed on current situation and weakness of the health care service provided by the State. A comparative study indicated that Thailand and India have done reasonably well in health sector by decreasing patient and health center ratio by establishing more and more health centers. In India and Thailand, aiurvedic and other indigenous treatment facilities have been given more importance which is always ignored in Bangladesh. Health sector is always ignored by the government of Bangladesh. It is not possible to achieve millennium development goal in health care if present situation continues. Good governance needs immediately to be established in order to make the health sector transparent and accountable. It is the responsibility of the State to make sure that every citizen particularly the poor and the marginalized has access to affordable, equitable and sustainable health care system.

3rd Session: Impact of essential service package on the poor

Dr. S. R. Mashreky of CIPRB, Ilias Mahmud of BRAC University, Dr. Sharifa Begum from BIDS, Saeed Asefzadeh of Qazvin University of medical Sciences, Iran and Prof. Md. Shah Alam Bhuiyan of NIPSOM were the speakers with Prof. Dr. Md. Zafarullah Chowdhury Director, NIPSOM as the chairperson of the session. This was revealed from the session that poor people especially peripheral population do not get proper health service due to unavailability of adequate health service provider. Doctors are very reluctant to stay at the work station if transferred to rural areas. Rural population has limited access to reproductive health facility though they are very concerned about their reproductive health. Sexual and reproductive health service delivery models need to understand the critical importance of incorporating lay understandings of sexual health. On the other hand, this was found from the discussion that maternal and infant mortality has been decreased considerably though primary health care is still not in a right direction to improve maternal health. The main reason of infant mortality is malnutrition. There is lack of knowledge about nutrition even among the population of Bangladesh staying in the higher wealth quintal end. Emphasis should be given on health education program regarding nutrition to create awareness about nutrition related health problem.

4th Session: Rational use of medicine

Only 13% drugs are sold according to doctors' prescription. Most irrationally used drug is antibiotic. Even doctors are not very cautious regarding prescribing antibiotics. Most of the physicians prescribe unessential additional drugs. There is no essential drug list for last 25 years. Due to exploitative market, almost 50% of our population has no reliable access to modern medicines and the rest 50% have access but are trapped into using non-essential, irrational and even dangerous drugs. This widespread irrationality prevails both in the private and public sectors, leads towards serious health problems and wastage of scarce resources. In order to ensure rational use of medicine national drug policy must play an effective role. Quality and safety of drug should be assured along with affordable price. Improved public

awareness through continuing medical education is the key to establish rational use of medicine. The session was chaired by Prof. Dr. A K Azad Chowdhury, ex vice chancellor of Dhaka University and papers were presented by Moshir Rahman, Dr. Julia Ahmed and Prof. ABM Faroque, Dhaka University.

5th Session: Public-private partnership

A case of Germany about decentralization of power and role of the State in the health care service was presented and various aspects of such examples were discussed to learn its feasibility for Bangladesh. On the other hand, the trend of privatizing different government hospitals was criticized. Due to lack of manpower, monitoring system of government is not working properly. If community clinics are being moved to private sector those could also not be monitored properly by the government. More importantly, the marginalized people will be the biggest victim of so-called public-private partnership. The role of newly developed corporate hospitals in health care delivery was also criticized in this session. The session public-private partnership was conducted by Dr. Khairul Islam, country director of Water aid. Speakers of the session were A. M. Zakir Hussain, Consultant PSO; Jean-Olivier Schmidt of GTZ; Dr. Zulfia Khan; Kazi Md. Abul Kalam Azad, lecturer of Independent university of Bangladesh; Farida Akhter of UBINIG and Dr. Mohammad Mushtuq Husain, Senior Scientific Officer of IEDCR.

6th Session: Public-public partnership

Dr. Rashid-E-Mahbub, Ex Pro VC, BSMMU; Nazmoon Nahar of Naripokkho; Hasnain Sabih Nayak from IUB; Md. Rezaul Karim of TIB and Dr. Nasreen Khan, Unnayan Onneshan presented paper in this session. It was discussed in this session the government needs to emphasize the coordination between different bodies to make health service delivery more effective rather than privatization of government hospitals. It is observed public-private partnership that was developed to provide health care to marginalized population has not been worked. Health is a right and government has to empower people to exercise that right with responsibilities. Mr. Rashed Al Mahmud Titumir, Chairman of Unnayan Onneshan said in his closing speech of the conference that public-public partnership needs to be strengthened in stead of public-private partnership to save the marginalized people. He said that government should also rethink about health policy. Mr. Nurul Kabir, editor of New Age was present in this session as a special guest, which was chaired by Maj. Gen. (Retd) Dr. M Shahjahan of State University of Bangladesh.

A process of accumulation of full papers from all authors is going on. Papers will be peer reviewed and a conference anthology will be published very soon. Finally, the conference anthology will be disseminated to special guests, chairpersons of the sessions, all speakers, guests, journalists and other stakeholders of Public Health activities. A post-conference newsletter will also be published shortly.