

# **Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SDNP)**

## **Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies**

### **A Status Report**

August 26, 2002

#### **A. WHAT IS SDNBD**

The Sustainable Development Networking Programme (SDNP) is a global catalytic initiative launched by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in response to Agenda 21, which articulated the need for improved information dissemination to support sustainable development. The programme is geared towards facilitating communication between users and suppliers of sustainable development information in developing countries.

At the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil in June 1992, a global plan of action for sustainable development was endorsed by over 179 countries. This blueprint of action, more popularly known as AGENDA 21, emphasizes the importance of environmentally competent technologies, education, public awareness and training in achieving the goals of sustainable development. AGENDA 21 also recognizes the importance of capacity building especially in developing countries in order that strategies for sustainable development could be implemented. Capacity building refers to "cooperation with developing countries that encourages them to develop human and organizational resources to plan and implement sustainable development."

At the Earth Summit, the UNDP was given the leading role within the UN development system for capacity building. CAPACITY 21, an action plan to assist developing countries formulate economic, social and environmental goals, plans, programs and policies that would lead to sustainable development became UNDP's response to this challenge.

The Sustainable Development Networking Programme, or the SDNP is one of the concrete initiatives under the Global Agenda 21, specifically on Chapter 40 entitled "Information for Decision Making."

The SDNP is more than an information network. It embraces a whole spectrum of processes and events that ultimately contributes to the formulation and implementation of sustainable development strategies. In linking sources and users of information, the SDNP employs both face-to-face meetings, electronic and other means of communications. In this manner, the target population becomes more active for participating in the development processes.

The Government of Bangladesh put efforts to address these issues in collaboration with donors, policy initiators, NGOs and other advocacy groups. Among others it has approved the National Environment Management Action Plan (NEMAP) in 1996. NEMAP is in line with Agenda 21 and the Rio Earth Summit of 1992.

NEMAP was formulated through a massive consultative process involving grassroots workshops, regional workshops and professional and expert group workshops. In 1997, as a follow-up to NEMAP, the Government approved the UNDP-assisted Sustainable Environment Management Program (SEMP). The SDNP in Bangladesh falls under the Awareness and Advocacy Sub-Program of SEMP.

One of the strategies for promoting Awareness and Advocacy is enabling easy access to information and knowledge. To effectively implement such a strategy, the SDNBD aims to capitalize on the revolution in electronic communications and provide a new set of tools to achieve sustainable development through sharing of vital information, experience and expertise both within the country and globally.

Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) is the implementing agency for SDNBD. Established in October 1999, the project provides a meeting place that supports the sustainable development information needs of all sectors of society. The SDNBD is an information technology systems integrator with support services ranging from system design, email/Internet access, network (LAN, WAN, Intranet) installation, training, hosting (design, development and maintenance) of web sites, and establishment of relational databases.

## **B. VISION**

To be a service provider for improved information networking among advocates of sustainable development.

## **C. MISSION**

Facilitate easy access, linkage and dissemination of information on sustainable development through simple, cost effective and easily replicable information technology processes.

## **D. OBJECTIVES**

The objective of the SDNBD is to create an appropriate tool - the SDN - for achieving and facilitating exchange of information and knowledge regarding sustainable development (process, practice, ideas) among development practitioners (government, development agencies, partners, NGOs), academia, policy makers and the civil society, at local, regional, national and international level, in order to design and implement unique plans for sustainable development in Bangladesh.

Specific objectives are to:

- Provide easier, more affordable and rapid access of information to users in governmental, research and educational, non-governmental, and partner organizations.
- Develop simple, cost-effective and replicable information systems that would enhance the capacity for information networking of individuals and organizations in sustainable development.
- Introduce and connect public, private and non-government sector agencies to local and international sources of information on sustainable development utilizing the Internet, relational databases and other communication tools.
- Develop appropriate technical services to support the implementation of local and national development plans for sustainable development.

## **E. NATURE OF INFORMATION**

Related to Environment:- The main concern of SDNBD is to provide a digital platform for all Sub-Implementing Agencies of SEMP and organizations related to this issue.

Related to Sustainable Development:- Subjected to regular updates, SDNBD is maintaining 71 categories of information related to developmental issues in local, regional, national and international context. Collaborational efforts are at hand to accumulate information and databases in these criteria and expedite mass dissemination.

## **F. METHODOLOGY OF SDNBD**

The methodology for developing the SDN is to establish a non-profit internet service provider (ISP) having a central hub in Dhaka city at the Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), which is the implementing agency of SDNP. Upto five/six regional nodes will be established in Mymensingh, Chittagong, Khulna, Barisal, Sylhet, and Rajshahi, through a combination of systems that include Local Area Networking, Wide Area Networking, Microwave links, and VSAT Online networking.

The SDNBD primarily makes use of available information and communication technology (ICT) techniques. However, the use of conventional communication tools such as radio, television and the print media has also been promoted to reach greater number stakeholders who do not have access to computers and the Internet. The SDNBD facilitates access to its resources by collaborating with other information providers to establish electronic community access points (Public Internet Access Centres) in several locations around Dhaka and across the country.

To assist in the establishment of the SDN, UNDP is providing BIDS with a starter kit comprising computer hardware and software, management and training tools, decision support tools, and other resources to ensure long-term compatibility with SDNs operating in other developing countries.

A Steering Committee is providing advisory support to BIDS. The Committee comprises of IT specialists as well as representatives of the Government, of the SEMP partners, of the media, of academic/research institutions, of the private sector, and other stakeholders.

The SDNBD:

- maintains a central web site
- collects, collates and posts information relevant to sustainable development
- observes national and international days on related issues through hosting of web folders
- establishes community telecentres and information networks
- conducts training and workshops in information management and computer mediated communication
- assists partners in establishing web sites, and sourcing and posting information
- provides technical assistance for establishing networking among partners
- hosts web sites for stakeholders and partners.

## **G. BENEFICIARIES OF SDNBD**

While the project provide benefit to all sectors of the society, focus is placed primarily on the needs of community-based organisations (CBO's) in rural areas as well as farmers, women's groups, rural youths, small and medium entrepreneurs. Other primary beneficiaries include partners in development such as government agencies, the private sector, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), international donors, teachers and students, research institutions and persons who wish to acquire knowledge and information on general issues, research, markets and investment opportunities, environmental protection, pollution control and natural resources management, as well as sustainable development policy and programme information.

Subscribers to the SDN have been given access to standard Internet services as well as to a database (under continuous update) and maintained by SDNBD. The initial subscribers include ministries of the Government of Bangladesh and other agencies that are implementing the various components of SEMP. These agencies are also expected to contribute to the database, and/or through the SDN, set up web sites to disseminate information on their activities and achievements.

In addition the SDN caters to other users (corporate, groups, institutions) wishing to access the database and to standard Internet services. Such users include national and regional press clubs, academic and research institutions, and public libraries. Furthermore, other civil society groups such as various professional associations, trade-unions, civic bodies including local government bodies are also expected to be brought into the network.

## **H. SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES**

The project is operating under two separate windows with necessary adjustments and modifications with dynamic niche targeting. In one aspect it is an ISP providing services at not-for-profit basis. On the other hand, to reach out grass root level users, efforts are made to establish the regional hubs and community access centres. Furthermore, collaborational efforts are at hand to make the programme sustain beyond the project period with long-term exit strategy. It has been expected that by October 2002, the first regional node at Mymensingh will be operating. During November-December 2002, a consultant can be recruited to develop the business plan. About February 2003, there could be an evaluation team sent from SDN HQ for evaluating the project in terms of installations, methodology, databases, and other indicators including future expansion provisions.