

World Health Day 2008

Stop Commercialization of Health

Public demands protection of Health due to Climate change

Every year on 7th April 'World Health Day' is celebrated through out the world. To create a center of attention of global citizens regarding health problems as well as to increase awareness on health, this day is observed as the significance of birth anniversary of World Health Organization. The theme of this year is, "Protect human health from negative impact of climate change". The rapid anti-environmental destructive industrialization, urbanization and capitalism oriented consumerism life-style of people have severely accelerated the change of global climate which has caused tremendously detrimental impact on human health, livelihood and threat to existence of human beings.

According to the 3rd observation report (2001) of UN Inter-Government Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), "it has a specific justification of creating global warming mostly by human beings across the globe in the last 50 years". Through out the 20th Century, the temperature of surface has increased by 0.6% and two-thirds of it has been contributed after 1975. The IPCC has also assumed that the temperature of global world will increase few more centigrades in 21st Century. According to the report of World Health Organization 2002, around 2.4% people of world infected by diarrhea and 6% by malaria for which climate change is largely responsible.

Three kinds of impact may cause on human health due to climate change:

1. Direct- due to extreme climate human health could be damaged
2. Change of environment and surroundings due to climate change which ultimately have negative impact on human health
3. As result of eviction from homesteads due to climate change, people are mostly victims of contagious diseases, malnutrition and psychological disorders.

Substantially, detrimental impact due to climate change is bestowed on the basic indicators of health like as, food, water and air. Malaria, diarrhea and dengue are common diseases mostly caused by climate change. Every year 3 million people fall to death infected by these contaminated diseases. It has not been able to determine the indirect threat and risk on human health caused by climate change. The entire human beings are confronted to this reality but especially the poorer sections of people may experience harsher blow due to climate change. The climate change will surely adhere to threat the achievement of health sector that has been achieved so far. The achievement of MDGs will be quite impossible if this issue is not properly addressed in work plans.

The natural disasters in South Asia have claimed thousands of people due to climate change. The people of rural areas are mostly lost lives by it. Especially, children, old and women are crucially vulnerable to climate change. The diseases have been increased in India and Bangladesh due to food in 2006. Last year in November, about 8.5 millions people have been victimized by the super cyclone SIDR and more than 3300 people have lost their lives. As a result, people of those particular areas are mostly infected by diarrhea, skin diseases, eyes contamination, pneumonia and typhoid. Presently, the issue of climate change has been appeared as a new challenge.

It is possible to meet the problem by traditional public health protection strategies like as, provision of pure water and sanitation facilities, safe and adequate food, immunization activities, monitoring of diseases and taking necessary steps.

But, the question is what will be the policy of government regarding health sector? Privatization-commercialization or patronship of state in health sector? Although, it is the stated responsibility of the state according to article 15 of Bangladesh constitution to ensure health facilities along with indispensable support of livelihood of people, but the previous governments have ushered privatization and commercialization of health sector under structural adjustment activities directed by international financial institutions like as World Bank and IMF. The entire health sector is in a vicious cycle due to lack of insight of Bangladesh government and capricious control of multilateral corporations. The ground reality is that the poor people could not avail the benefits of health science and health facilities due to expensive, high technology depended health services which is run completely profit oriented mostly influenced by multilateral companies. As a consequence, billions of poor people of third-world country are deprived from basic health care facilities.

Even though, it has been promised to ensure health facilities for every people of the world in the Alma Ata declaration by World Health Organization in 1978 but the universal health care facility for every people has not been ensured yet. In this regard, it is necessary to coordinate comparatively cheaper but available indigenous health practices with modern health care services. The Trips Treatment of World Trade Organization is going to be implemented from 2016. Our traditional precious herbal medicines will soon be patented by developed countries and multinational companies if proper steps are not taken immediately.

The news on atrocity of multinational companies in fixing high prices of drugs, scarcity of life saving drugs, gorgeous business of clinics and diagnostics centers by commissioned preferred doctors and influence patients to go to private clinics by intermediaries is being regularly published on the newspapers. As a result people irrespective of poor and rich have been stigmatized in this existing situation. The poor people of city and rural areas are embracing death due to lack of treatment of curable diseases. On the other hand, the prevalence of luxurious hospitals like as Square and Apollo has reflected clearly the acute crisis of health services. Moreover, due to high prevalence of corruption in health sectors, mismanagement of hospitals and people's lack of confidence in existing treatment system every year thousands pf patients are going to neighboring countries for treatment. As a consequence, we are exploiting lots of foreign currency every year.

On the other hand, the allocation of government to health sector is inadequate. In 2007-08 the total budget of government is 79,614 crore taka. Allocation for health sector is 5,470 crore taka which is 6.6% of national budget. Although, this allocation is 14% more of the previous year (2006-07) but inadequate in terms of per person of the total population (per head 390 taka). Only to ensure reproductive health, every year 9% of the total budget is required.

It has been mentioned in PRSP of Bangladesh government to ensure health services for poor people and to ensure MDGs target Bangladesh government need to allocate 10-12% of national budget to the health sector. But, in the current fiscal year government's allocation is only 6% of the total budget.

More than 50% money is spent for salary of the staffs and administrative expenditures out of the total budget of the health sector. Reasonably, it is not possible to invest for development of health infrastructure. Besides this, investment for purchasing advanced technologies of health sector is nearly to zero. For this reason, to ensure health facilities according to the PRSP of government, it is necessary to increase hospital beds in Upazilla level, appoint required doctors and nurses, and long-term investment plan for providing highly developed technologies for better health care services.

Necessary indications to overcome this situation:

- The state should take responsibility for public health. This is the right time to stop commercialization and privatization of health services.
- It is necessary to establish 100 beds hospital in Upazilla level and double the numbers of doctors and nurses. Along with this, child and orthopedics doctors should be appointed.
- The attendance of Upazilla level doctors should be ensured. Adequate medicines for patients and food for extra patients against beds should be properly managed.
- Presently, there are 3575 community clinics existing in Bangladesh but most of them are useless. The budget should be increased to activate those community clinics. Appointing health assistants and providing urgent drugs and materials in those clinics, primary and maternal health care services to be ensured for poor people of rural areas.
- To provide advanced trainings for the doctors working in the rural areas and adequate paramedics and nurses should be appointed in Union level.
- The government should have effective role in control of quality and fixing prices of drugs.
- To ensure health services of poor people a national drugs policy has been formulated in 1982 which never saw any ray of light. For this particular reason, the prices of drugs are going beyond the purchasing capacity of poor people. On the other hand, the local markets are being floated with the low quality imported drugs. For this reason, it is necessary to stop importing lower quality of drugs and save domestic drug industries through full implementation of national drug policy.

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