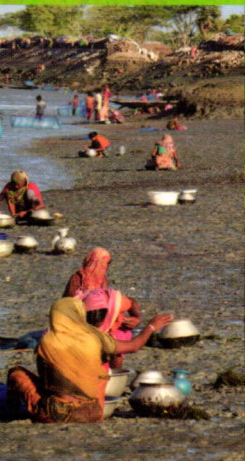


Investigative Reports

Environment and Human Rights



Edited by
Philip Gain

Investigative Reports: Environment and Human Rights

Editor
Philip Gain

Contributors

Philip Gain, Shishir Moral, Qurratul-Ain-Tahmina, Partha Shankar Saha, FMA Salam, Aneeka Malik, Debashish Majumder, Khadiza Khanam, Lucille Sircar, Shanjida Khan Ripa, Shekhar Kanti Ray, Snigdha Emelda Tigga, Priscilla Raj, Ronald Halder, Kamran Munna, Mohammad Tanzimuddin Khan.

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Dhaka-1207, Bangladesh
Tel: 880-2-9121385 Fax: 880-2-9125764
E-mail: sehd@citech.net
Website: www.sehd.org

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The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD), a non-profit Bangladeshi organization, was founded in 1993 to promote investigative reporting, engage in action-oriented research, assist people think and speak out. *Investigative Reports: Environment and Human Rights* compiles investigative and interpretative reports that SEHD has published in the press and its magazines—*Dharitri* and *Earth Touch* since 1993. The reports cover two broad areas—environment and human rights—and present facts and analyses that are desired for understanding complex and disturbing issues relating to human rights and environment.

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Introduction

This book compiles investigative and interpretative reports of the Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) that works mainly in two areas—environment and human rights. Many actors are engaged in these two important areas. However, SEHD's approaches and strategies have some uniqueness and differences. One such unique feature is that SEHD has remained deeply engaged in investigative reporting in these areas since its was established in 1993. It has also trained hundreds of journalists, human rights defenders, and development actors in reporting and documentation.

Most 61 of selected reports and analyses published in this book have been written by SEHD investigators and research staff. Journalists associated with SEHD have written some of the reports. The first cluster of the reports in the book is about the latest situation of the Modhupur *sal* forest and the life of the forest villagers. There is great enthusiasm among the journalists and environmentalists about the Modhupur *sal* forests. One question that is raised: Why is the third largest forest of Bangladesh shrinking towards death? We have been investigating specific concerns related to the Modhupur *sal* forest for the last two decades. We have also been alerting people with facts that monoculture plantations (rubber and social forestry in particular) and the invasion of banana among others have led Modhupur to this ecological catastrophe.

Despite great enthusiasm and reporting, the number of investigative reports on Modhupur is meager. The recent reports of SEHD are an attempt to fill that void to some extent. In our other publications: *The Last Forests of Bangladesh*, *Bon, Bon Binash O Bonbashir Jibon Sangram* (forests, forest destruction and the struggle of the forest people), *Bangladesher Biponno Bon* (endangered forests of Bangladesh) and *Stolen Forest*; and documentary films—*Mandi* and *Stolen Forests*—we have provided a great deal of background and analysis about the underlying factors for the destruction of the Modhupur *sal* forest. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and the World Bank that have been much criticized for funding monoculture plantations of exotic

species on the land of native forests have reportedly stopped funding any forestry project in Bangladesh since 2007. We believe that SEHD reports, books and documentary films have played a definitive role in influencing these two international financial institutions in changing their policies and strategies in the forestry sector.

The Phulbari Coalmine Project in Dinajpur District has recently become a hot spot to attend. A number of SEHD reports on the controversial coalmine are contained in this book. The aspiring [British] company to mine is Asia Energy. The SEHD investigators began to visit Phulbari since January 2006. What we gathered is while the local people generally support mining coal, the majority of them are against open-cut mining. In our efforts to understand the complex issues concerning Phulbari Coal Project, we visited local communities and the Asia Energy offices and spoke to different kinds of sources of information. What we understood was that it would be impossible to mine coal in open-cut method by ignoring the opinions of the local communities and without their clear consent. Our first reports were picked up by the *Daily Sangbad* alone, which eventually had some impacts on other newspapers. However, investigative reports have never been adequate. The grassroots revolt that surfaced in Phulbari on 26 August 2006 shook the media and the whole nation. It also drew international attention. That such a revolt could have happened was indicated in our reports. We trust if the media attended the Phulbari Coalmine issue with investigative reporting, the killings and atrocities in Phulbari could have been averted. The reports on Phulbari contained in this book will be of some help in understanding the catastrophic situation we are in with the Phulbari Coalmine and energy.

A good number of reports on the threats to protected areas, much pollution in the leather industry, trade disaster with toxic fertilizers, arsenic contamination and protection against arsenic, threats to wetlands [with special attention to Chanda Beel], ecological catastrophe due to shrimp cultivation, destruction of the mangroves, and the recent natural disasters (*Sidr* and *Aila* in particular) are contained in the book. Information, analyses, anecdotes and insights contained in these reports are telling of the damages that man has

caused to Nature. These also warrant serious attention.

SEHD has always attended the Chittagong Hill Tracts, its indigenous peoples and the Adivasis of the plains with care. A number of reports particularly on the abuses of indigenous peoples in the CHT and elsewhere are contained in this book.

The book also contains a number of reports on abuses against sex workers, garments industry workers, Rohingyas and journalists.

The journalists in Bangladesh attempting to engage in investigative reporting face many difficulties. However, there are no alternatives to investigative and interpretative reporting for the news media to flourish in a country. The obstacles that lie ahead for the promotion of investigative reporting need to be carefully handled. Our experience is that the investigative reports are valued. Most of the reports published in this book had been published in different national newspapers and magazines with good care. We also feel that if a reporter is skilled, hard working and has the habit to work with honesty s/he can produce good reports and have those published with good care. One engaging in investigative reporting must bear in mind that there are processes, projects, issues and agencies trying to obstruct investigative reporting. Reporters must develop adequate intellectual clarity to get through these. SEHD has been providing information services since it was established, to develop such intellectual clarity.

This book is an aide to *Reporting Guide* (Bangla) also published by SEHD. Together, these two books may be of value to the students and faculties of journalism, working journalists, press rooms, human rights defenders, environmental actors, researchers and anyone interested.

We remain grateful to all those who have contributed reports, advice and technical support to make this publication possible. We are particularly thankful to Brother Jarlath D'Souza and Shakil Rabbi who have patiently gone through all the reports and write-ups published in this book and have provided us with editorial assistance. We are also very thankful to ICCO and Cordaid of the Netherlands and Misereor of Germany for their generous support for our research and investigations on complex issues. — Editor

Investigative Reports

Environment and Human Rights

This book is a compilation of investigative and interpretative reports. The Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) works primarily in the areas of environment and human rights. There are many organizations involved in these two areas. However, SEHD has some specialties in attending environment and human rights. One such specialty is that its researchers and devotees have remained deeply dedicated to investigative reporting since it was founded in 1993.

Investigative reporting is indeed a cornerstone for the press and the media. It is also essential in the public interest. The reporters engaged in investigative reporting seek ways to penetrate deep into an issue or problem. Those working against public interest and caught up in corruption create a shield to protect themselves. The investigative reporters try to break through such shield, a challenging job in a country like Bangladesh where journalists work under pressure and physical threats.

However, it is not that one has to necessarily seek serious misdemeanors and immoral acts in selecting issues for investigation. There are many economic, social, political and environmental issues that offer scopes for consistent investigative reporting. There are also myriad issues of national and community interest that relate to foreign investments, multinational companies, international financial institutions (IFIs) and different international processes. Most of the reports contained in *Investigative Reports: Environment and Human Rights* relate to these issues, processes and injustices done to nature, smaller ethnic communities, and the disadvantaged peoples of Bangladesh. This book offers a treasury of information to anyone interested to work with prudence in the areas of human rights and environment.

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