‘Shrinking Agricultural Land ,Forest-land and Water bodies disaster for the Country’

A View-exchange Meeting on

Protection of Arable Land, Planned Accommodation, Prosperous life and Compact Townships

**Date:** 17 October 2014

**Venue:** Chowmohoni, Begumganj, Noakhali



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1. A view-exchange meeting about Compact Townships(CT) was organized at Chowmohoni municipality in Begumganj Upazila under Noakhali district. Mr. Gias Uddin Farid, vice-Principal of Charfashion Degree Collegechaired the meeting, while Dr. Abul Hossain – General Secretary of Compact Township Foundation (CTF), Akther Hossain, Mayor, Chowmohoni Municipality and CTF’s core-team member Mr. Ekram Hossain graced the meeting as special guests.Chairmen of different union parishads, teachers of various colleges, teachers representatives of different high and primary schools, local political leaders, journalist’ leaders, representatives of print and electronic media, agriculturalists, student representatives, music teachers and artists including elites of the areaattended the meeting .
2. The CTF’s core-team member Mr. Ekram Hossain made an introductory speech at the beginningof the meeting . He described a pictorial scenario of Bangladesh that existed in the past and the present state of agriculture land loss and waning of water bodies and rivers .
3. Dr. Abul Hossain – General Secretary of CTF made a vivid and elaborate delivery in his speech on Compact Townships. He mentioned government statistics that every year 1 percent arable lands are being shrunk . If this trend continues, there will be no arable land in the country by 2060-70,” he said. “The population may reach to 24 to 28 crore in 2050. What will be situation with this huge number people? There will be no arable land, no land for accommodation. If the foreign countries reduce taking manpower from Bangladesh what will happen then ?Some say that many people of our country work in garment sector. But this sector is fragile. If we lose this market due to cheap labour elsewhere in the world. Then what will happen of this large number of people? We must think about these questions .” - Mr. Abul Hossain continued. He also gave a description of the advantage of Compact Townships ( CTs) and its various types and aspects.

**Discussion :**

1. **Asst. Professor Abdul Quiyum Masud** of Noakhali Science and Technology University opined that this is a new concept. Those who will participate in Compact Townships may think that they would just buy a flat or a house. At the present, implementing this idea may be a bit difficult. Because the persons who live abroad may think why should they come to Compact Townships? If some Compact Townships could be built as model, then people will be convinced. Many people of Bangladesh are unwilling to believe what they don’t see in front of their eyes. Mr. Quiyum Masud said if houses are built in a particular place, productivity will increase and this is logical. The way agriculture land is being reduced; this issue should come to the government.
2. **Mr. Moajjem Hossen**, Head Teacher said this is a very good concept. It will be difficult to tackle population problems after 50 years. But the question is how will we do the work? What is the government doing? He continued. The rich people may not join Compact Townships. Many rich people already have projects with 1-2 hundred acres of land.The government may make a law that no one can make build house hither and thither in small town. You have to first demonstrate by doing it in reality
3. **Mr. Jamaluddin**– General Secretary of Journalist Unity expressed his opinion that the arable and agro-land are not shrunk. Here he made reference to a govt. official living in Dhaka ,whose village home is in Noakhali. The person is so afraid of taking food as food adulteration is so high. That’s why this official visits his house in Begumganj and takes vegetables and fishes to cover the whole week. This person doesn’t do any kitchen shopping in Dhaka. The official also has opened a farm where he cultivates fish and fresh vegetables. He also used rice land by doing this. But he had no alternative.
4. **Mr. Farid Hossain opined that** if we become aware, Bangladesh will be aware. He pointed out that a CompactTownship may be built at Subarna Char of Noakhali district as there is vast vacant land for developing it.
5. **Mr. Mahbubul Haque Azad** thanked the Compact Township Foundation (CTF) for such a nice idea and for sharing it. He stated that with a small number of people it is not possible to carry it forward. To carry forward the task, it needs to involve many stakeholders including the Govt. and non-state actors .
6. The district representative of the Daily Prothom Alo, **Mr. Mahabubur Rahman**, said this idea was in his brain for many days. For professional reasons he has to visit different areas of the district and the environmental aspects are clearer to him. He also mentioned the brick kilns, which were not here in the past but there are now many kilns. When brick kilns are established, nearby lands remain non-arable. Government laws and rules are not followed in establishing the brick kilns.
7. Agriculturalist **D.K. Roy Chowdhury** portrayed some important issues very minutely in the meeting. His opinion is that, if such land loss continues, one-day natural disaster will destroy us all. Who will then bear the brunt? If there is no agro-land, natural disaster will appear. When something new is broached to us, 80% delay to accept, but 10% people are always there to accept it immediately.
8. The president of journalist union **Mr. Hanif Bhuiyan** while expressing his opinion made reference to the 80’s decade; when rural electrification was started, nobody believed it at first. They termed it as electricity business. They used to question one another that only 10 Tk. electricity bill, how come? They could not believe it.
9. Student representative **Mr. Choton Roy** joined the discussion and pointed out that a Bangladeshi scientist is working on urban development planning of Bahrain. He asked why we cannot do it in Bangladesh? He said there is lack of unity. He also mentioned the urban development of Singapore.
10. According to Mr. Ahasanullah – a local elite, if Compact Township can be built under the partnership of land-owners, government and us, it will be easier. Land-lord will provide lands, government will frame policy and we shall help with idea, thus it will be easier to build a compact township.

**Questions, opinions and suggestions:**

The following important questions, opinions and suggestions emerged from the exchange of views at the meeting:

1. The initiative is appreciable. First an example needs to be created. People will be able to visualize the idea is being implemented and many people are being benefitted. Then people will understand.
2. The government may enact laws that houses cannot be built hither and thither. If the government is not involved, the possibility of its implementation is less. The abjectly poor people would find a hope to survive if Compact Townships are built.
3. The vital question is – if pilot programme is not there, people will not believe.
4. We are suffering due to bribe and corruption. Where will the huge number of people live and will eat in future?
5. All people cannot be accommodated in the compact township. Because around 20,000 people live only in one ward in Noakhali region . This is a weakness of CT .
6. You (CTF) may make district-wise committee. A large portion of state mechanism may be utilized. People’s participation is required here.
7. The industrial area where there is available kind of product based on that co-operative system may be formed. And later by utilizing the savings and deposits the Compact Townships may formed without help of others.
8. Upazila Chairman, Vice-chairman and Municipality Mayor and UNO should be involved.
9. You must visit village and convince the farmers that small fish have become extinct, crops are being gray due to pollution. And there is no sanitation system.
10. Government initiative is required for policy framing. Public-private partnership is required here.
11. The Chowmohoni Mayor Mr. Akther Hossain Foysal while delivering his speech mentioned regarding the unconsciousness of their own. He said a person who lives abroad does not throw rubbish in the dustbin and the same person when in Bangladesh throw rubbish in the street without hesitation. It became a usual matter. The rubbish thrown in polythene creates obstacles in the drainage system. People do not want to spare even 1(one) foot space to get light and wind at home, but become stubborn in this regard. He pointed to the positive aspect of Compact township by explaining all these problems. He wishes success to the Compact Township Foundation.
12. The Chair of the view-exchange meeting explained various positive aspects and necessity of the compact townships. He expressed a good forward and steady success of the CTF. He also reiterated all sorts of co-operation from the people of his areato the Compact Township Foundation.