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Dhaka, 16 August 2007: Speakers here today called for strategic urban planning for Dhaka to promote environmentally sustainable growth of the country as well as of the capital.

"Greater Dhaka currently represents more than 40% of Bangladesh's national GDP. The overall urban planning process should take strategic planning principles into account to prevent the high risk of flooding to certain fringe areas of the Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan, which are likely to be further aggravated by climate change impacts in the medium to long term", said Xian Zhu, World Bank Country Director during a workshop here today.

A S M Rashidul Hai, Secretary, Ministry of Housing and Public Works was present as Chief Guest of the workshop on Strategic Environment Assessment of Dhaka Metropolitan Development Plan, jointly organized by RAJUK and the World Bank. A H M Rezaul Kabir, Secretary, Ministry of Environment and Forest and Muhammad Abul Quasem, Director General, Local Government Division also spoke in the inaugural session, chaired by K A M Haroon, Chairman, RAJUK.

Dhaka is also undergoing a massive expansion and its current population of 12 million will reach 20 million by 2020, making it the world's third largest city - unplanned growth, uncoordinated activities and unabated environmental pollution - the economic costs associated with environmental degradation may amount to more than 4% of GDP, said Khawaja Minnatullah, Senior Environmental Specialist of the World Bank.

The unplanned urbanization has raised two sets of environmental challenges in Dhaka city. The first arises from urban development projects in different sectors and industries which treat potential environmental effects as externalities and only try to mitigate these effects as an after thought and do not include it as an integral part of their project. The second set of environmental issues stem from the acute pressure on natural resources resulting from the indiscriminate use/misuse of these resources.

The Government undertook the Strategic Environmental Assessment (SEA), supported by the World Bank and implemented by RAJUK, to underpin the complex interactions between environmental, social, economic and institutional factors linked to the urban planning and development of Dhaka city.

The study found the urgent need for institutional reforms and strengthening of key planning agencies like RAJUK, to ensure that urban planning in Dhaka is undertaken in a holistic manner. It also called for factoring the needs of the weaker sections of the society, neglected in the planning process so far. The Study also highlighted an urgency to draw up integrated regional planning, taking into account the entire Dhaka Metropolitan Development Area.

The SEA is the result of a participatory process involving extensive dialogue among policy makers, planners, stakeholders and civil society. The findings of the study will provide strategic inputs to projects like the Dhaka Integrated Environment and Water Resources Management Project (DIEWRMP) which is currently being scoped.

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