

eight conclusion

In the aftermath of the Peace Accord of 1997, a number of major developments on forest and land issues seem more than likely. The rulings of the land commission may be unable to adequately resolve the multi-dimensional problem of land possession (and dispossession) from a humanitarian perspective. The acceleration of the land privatisation process in the CHT, which may exclude the relatively disadvantaged section of CHT residents, is certain to continue at an even faster pace. The rate of deforestation in the forest areas is also likely to continue as before. These developments would surely hamper the post-Accord process of rehabilitation and development, and deepen the ecological crisis that has been accelerated by the Kaptai Dam, endemic deforestation, and the unsuitable plantation and cultivation patterns of recent years. More importantly, they may well fuel further political unrest – and worse.

In the circumstances, many people – including human rights workers, development planners, and economists – consider that it would be useful to have a comprehensive policy regarding the land and other natural resources of the region to ensure equitable and environmentally sound resource use practices. However, having a policy without proper implementation strategies would be useless. Any new policy that is framed would need to carry the people with it, including farmers, traders, community leaders, and government officials. For any such reforms to work, the importance of traditional indigenous resource management systems and innovations needs to be acknowledged and maintained insofar as they are appropriate to the socio-economic and cultural needs of CHT society today. Above all, such a policy should be fair on the basis of ethnicity and class, and be non-discriminatory towards women. This calls for intense lobbying with government leaders, and lending and donor agencies, and strong arguments that clearly demonstrate that such a strategy will benefit both the CHT people and greater Bangladeshi society at large.