

# **Land Policies, Land Management and Land Degradation in the Hindu Kush-Himalayas**

**Bangladesh Study Report**

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**A. Kamal  
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**International Centre for Integrated  
Mountain Development  
Kathmandu, Nepal  
1999**

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# Preface

The Mountain Farming Systems' Division of ICIMOD, with support from the Global Mountain Programme, initiated a comparative study on the effect of land policies on land management and degradation in six regional countries; Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Nepal, and Pakistan; sharing the Hindu Kush-Himalayan mountain range. One study was commissioned in each country. The exception to this was India where two studies, one in the Northwest and one in the Northeast, were conducted to capture the diversity and size of the Indian Himalayas. Each of the country studies was carried out by a team of experts from biological as well as socioeconomic disciplines.

The study was based on a concept paper developed by Professor Piers Blaikie in association with ICIMOD staff. The Team Leaders of the country studies came to ICIMOD in May 1997 to discuss the concept paper and agree on the methodology and operational aspects of the project. Each of the studies was to investigate four sectoral policies, e.g., Agriculture, Forestry, Wildlife and National Parks, and Tenure and Property Rights. Additionally, each study looked at the national and or provincial environmental policy and its implementation. The idea was to investigate thoroughly all the sectoral policies and their impact on land management. Each of the studies also chose one particular issue of interest for the country or area that had a significant impact on land management. The study period was between June-October 1997 and final reports were presented in a workshop at ICIMOD in early November. Subsequently, the reports were revised for publication.

We believe that, by publishing these studies, ICIMOD will facilitate an important contribution for a wider audience, in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region and beyond, who would benefit from the detailed information and analysis of this very important topic.

ICIMOD would like to acknowledge the contribution of Professor Piers M. Blaikie, of the University of East Anglia, U.K., in the design and implementation of this study. From within the Centre, Professor Blaikie was assisted by Dr. Syed Zahir Sadeque, Social Scientist, ICIMOD, and Dr. Tej Partap, Head, Mountain Farming Systems and coordinator of the Global Mountain Programme at ICIMOD. In addition, a multidisciplinary advisory team of ICIMOD professionals, namely, Dr M.Banskota, Dr N.S.Jodha, and Dr T.S.Papola, provided valuable inputs during the study.

Tej Partap

Syed Zahir Sadeque

# **Abstract**

The present study on land policies, land management and land degradation in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHTs) of Bangladesh is part of an overall effort by ICIMOD to assess the impact of land policies on land management and land degradation in the Hindu Kush-Himalayan region. The study highlights that the CHTs vary in important ways from other parts of the HKH region. First, the CHT region has both hills and plains with forest and agricultural lands. Second, it is inhabited equally by recently settled migrants from the plains and the hill tribes. The 1900 instrument of administration distinguished this area from the rest of the country until 1998, resulting in a variation in land policies for the CHTs and those for the rest of the country.

The study indicates that because of the resettlement issue and conflicts arising, it may be unrealistic to relate directly the process of land degradation in the CHTs to the impact of land policies. The policy initiatives indicate that it was recognised that there is less land pressure in the CHTs, so more people can be encouraged to migrate to the hills. Second, land policies recognised traditional shifting cultivation as a damaging practice and discouraged it. Interestingly, new settlers brought with them the knowledge and practice of settled plough farming to the CHTs which caused more soil erosion from farmlands. However, land policies have so far not taken this fact into account and are silent about it. Policies in place favour forest conservation and resettlement of shifting cultivators outside the forests.

The study concludes that holistic land policies are needed to integrate the hill people with the mainstream process of development in Bangladesh, if land degradation in the CHTs has to be curtailed and the ultimate goal of sustainable environmental management achieved

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