

Chapter 2

Key Policy Issues and Reasons for Prioritisation

2.1 National Environmental Strategy

By first looking at the National Environmental Strategies and Environmental Action Plan (NEMAP), it is intended that a macro-view of the environmental strategies currently in practice is presented. The evolution of environmental strategy and its action plans reflects a particular awareness of the planners which no doubt influences implementation processes.

2.2 Property Regimes, Tenure and Tenancy

Ownership of land is the most sensitive form of property right that provides access to resources. CHTs, with a population of a little over a million, cover more than a tenth of the country. Only 3.2 per cent of the CHT land surface, basically flatlands, is suitable for all-purpose plough agriculture. Another 2.9 per cent is suitable partly for fruit gardening and partly for agriculture, but only after slopes are

terraced; this is hardly 0.4 ha for every 10 people.

2.3 Forest Policy

The CHTs are overwhelmingly a forest region. The Bangladesh Forest Department recognises three categories of forests in CHTs. These are Reserved Forests (RF), Protected Forests (PF), and Unclassed State Forests (USF). Out of a total area of 1.3 million ha, RF cover 322,000 ha or about 24 per cent; PF cover 14,038 ha or about one per cent; and USF cover 997,000 ha or about 75 per cent (ADB 1976). Forest products are the main source of household energy in CHTs. Forests also provide grazing for cattle and timber for the rest of the country. CHTs' forestry's importance in the maintenance of biodiversity and environmental conservation is well recognised.

2.4 Wildlife Conservation Policy

The CHTs were once the abode of rich wildlife. The wildlife now face a serious

threat from poachers and illegal commercial interests. As a result, current national forestry policies are committed to increasing the amount of protected areas to 10 per cent of the reserved forest land by 2015. Both biodiversity conservation and livelihood considerations have to be taken into account when developing wildlife and biodiversity projects.

2.5 Agricultural Policy

Agriculture in the CHTs is critically important for sustaining the food–population balance. Although only a small percentage of land is available for agriculture, it provides a livelihood for most people. As far as food production is concerned, CHTs have a clear advantage over the rest of Bangladesh. Plough cultivation and *jhumming* are the two forms of cultivation in CHTs.

2.6 Development Projects, Displacement and Settlement of People from the Hills and Plains

The Kaptai dam and hydroelectric plant built between 1957 and 1963 with USAID funding is perhaps the principal cause of recent dispossession of tribal land in CHTs. The artificial Kaptai Lake, created from the construction of the dam, submerged 650 sq. km. of prime farming land which accounted for 40 per cent (approx. 26,000 ha) of the total cultivable land—possessed mainly by hill people. This severely disrupted the population–resources balance and required the resettlement and ‘rehabilitation’ of those displaced. Subsequent resettlement of plains’ people for security reasons, and consequent displacement of hill people, and current resettlement following the peace process have important policy implications for land use and land management in CHTs.