

Chapter 10 Conclusion

Since the sixteenth century, the CHT region has gradually become more populated. Most residents have migrated from outside. This has contributed to environmental change. Food production techniques have changed from hunting and food-gathering to *jhumming* to plough agriculture. Thus people's livelihood pattern has also changed. Traditional subsistence-oriented economy is being replaced by a market-oriented economy. Socioeconomic differentiation has also gained momentum. All these processes have affected the quality of the environment, yet the situation does not seem to be out of control. The people of the area are in favour of a policy that strikes a balance between livelihood concerns and environmental concerns.

The CHTs are politically in a transitional phase. Since the late 1950s, the effects of the Karnaphuli hydroelectric power plant have influenced demography and land use. Kaptai dam not only displaced a huge number of hill people from the best quality plough lands, it also affected the land-use pattern of a large area of CHTs because of resettlement. From the early 1970s, the

grievances of the hill people surfaced vigorously and the outcome was a prolonged armed conflict with the Bangladesh State machinery. During the period of armed conflict, state policies were driven by principles of state security, resulting in all kinds of distortions in other policy areas. Frequent displacement and resettlement of the hill and plains' people, strategic terrain preparation, and development requirements were the most important policy processes unleashed in CHTs. These had direct impacts on land use and land management and allegedly resulted in land degradation. As a result, it is a daunting task to directly relate land degradation to various policies.

Increased population pressure and shortage of appropriate land for *jhumming* have meant that indigenous technology and knowledge of *jhum* culture, which does little harm to the hill ecology, have gradually been lost. About 90 per cent of the population depend upon subsistence agriculture and the majority of them are still involved in *jhumming* (Khisa 1995). Control or regulation of *jhumming* has not been effective.

However, when land-ownership patterns began to change, people started to manage the fallow period of *jhum* by practising agroforestry. There are cases of stable, integrated land use with good agroforestry, particularly in rehabilitated villages (Chakma 1994). The change to a settled life has started to bring about an intensive land-use and management system in place of an environmentally unacceptable *jhum*-cultivation system.

The current National Forestry Policy directives are consistent with what are needed in practice: participatory afforestation and rehabilitation of *jhumia*. Intensive land use and management in land-based production systems, instead of *jhumming*, seem to be the most appropriate systems conducive to maintaining a sound bio-physical environment in the region. *Jhumia* rehabilitation programmes will replace *jhumming* with stable and integrated land use and management, while participatory afforestation will expand forest areas, provide soil and watershed protection, and increase forest resource productivity. An appropriate balance between land for forestry and land for survival and livelihood has to be struck. People in CHTs are not strict conservationists, but they would like to see maintenance of environmental quality at an optimal level.

The CHT region has suffered political turmoil during the last two and half decades, partly caused by the conflict between the particular interests of the hill people and the general interest of the nation-state dominated by plains' people. A few issues are still unresolved despite the treaty signed by both the government and the *Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity*. Indeed, implementation of the treaty introduced fresh tension in the peace process. Following the peace treaty,

a quasi-separate status for the CHTs has been accorded leading to the suspension of armed conflict. Optimists among the hill people feel that they will be able to have more control of environmentally friendly, policy-making processes, but cynics are not so sure. The bureaucratic culture that pervades the governance style results in high-sounding and apparently pro-people and pro-environment policy. However, populist pressure distorts policy during implementation.

The absence of people in the policy-making and implementation processes allows policy prescription and policy adoption to go unchallenged by any process of scrutiny. The lack of transparency and accountability of the implementing agencies of the government further aggravate this situation. This scenario is valid for the whole nation. What makes it worse in CHTs is the insensitivity of policy-makers towards its special conditions: both demographic and physical. The competitive claims on the resources of CHTs by the national elite over the ethnic minorities have expressed themselves in policy measures that were taken without consultation.

One would be inclined to agree with Roy, the Chakma Chief, that unless there is a serious commitment from the side of the national leadership towards transparency and accountability in their governance style, the risk that the wrongful policies of the past will continue to influence the policies of CHTs will remain. Unless the people of CHTs consider themselves the subjects of their own development, the paternalistic policies of leaders will continue to shape their lives whether they like it or not. All efforts should be made to integrate hill people into the process of development at the planning and implementation stages to avoid past mistakes.