

4 Other National Policies

There are some national policies, other than those on forestry, that may have a direct or indirect impact on the forestry sector. They include the:

- Environment Policy,
- Agricultural Extension Policy,
- Water Policy, and
- Industrial Policy.

4.1 The National Environment Policy of 1992

The National Environment Policy of 1992 has the following major objectives.

- To maintain a balance in nature by preserving and improving the environment
- To save communities from natural disasters
- To identify and control all kinds of pollution and any activities degrading the environment
- To ensure environmentally friendly development of all sectors
- To ensure environmentally acceptable use of all national resources on a sustainable basis
- To be a partner in all international environmental endeavours

To achieve these objectives, the National Environment Policy has set up guidelines for 15 different sectors of the Government of Bangladesh such as agriculture, industry, health, energy, flood control, land, and forest. It has made it mandatory to conduct an Environmental Impact Analysis (EIA) for any new project, especially for industries.

The Environment Policy of 1992 has yet to be fully implemented. Implementation of this policy will eventually impose restrictions on many activities in different sectors. This policy, while providing more scope for tree planting, conservation of wildlife and biodiversity, and promotion of erosion control activities, may eventually interfere with production forestry activities such as clear felling and raising of short rotation monoculture plantations.

4.2 The National Agricultural Extension Policy of 1997

The National Agricultural Extension Policy of 1997 has the major objective of encouraging all service agencies in the field of agriculture to provide efficient, effective, and coordinated services. This policy has 11 salient features.

- To help all categories of farmers
- To provide efficient extension services
- To decentralize agricultural extension services
- To provide a demand-oriented extension service
- To use farmer groups when providing extension services
- To strengthen the cooperation between agricultural research and agricultural extension
- To train extension workers
- To use appropriate extension procedures
- To deliver an integrated approach
- To have a coordinated extension approach
- To have an environmentally compatible approach

This new agricultural extension policy does not conflict with forestry sector activities. In the absence of any land-use policy, however, field implementation of this policy may at times lead to conflicts in fixing the priority between forestry and agriculture for fallow lands.

4.3. The National Water Policy

The salient features of the National Water Policy are as follow.

- Before undertaking any planning with respect to a water resource, a comprehensive assessment of the resource should be undertaken.
- Unplanned and haphazard construction of roads, railways, or other infrastructures can alter the drainage pattern of a basin. The development of infrastructure should be consistent with the overall development plan for the area so that the natural drainage pattern is not affected.
- Emphasis is given to the conservation of ground water.
- Erosion controls through cost-effective methods have been highlighted.
- In the planning, implementation, and operation of water resource projects, the preservation of the quality of the environment and the natural balance should be maintained.

This National Water Policy does not conflict with forestry activities; rather it is favourable towards afforestation activities.

4.4. National Industrial Policy

The most recent National Industrial Policy was declared on July 29th 1991. Export-oriented industries contribute five per cent to GNP growth, and privatisation of government-owned industries is the major goal of this policy. The objectives of the policy are as follow.

- National production, income, resources, and job opportunities are to be enhanced through improvement of the industrial sector.
- National and international investments are to be encouraged in establishing industries.

- Export-oriented, export-linked, and import substitute-oriented industries need to be developed.
- Small and cottage industries are to be encouraged.
- Improvements in labour-intensive industries are to be expedited through procurement and or development of appropriate technologies.
- Industries based on domestic raw material and/or domestic technologies are to be encouraged.
- Investments in intermediate and basic industries are to be encouraged.
- Balanced distribution of industries throughout the country is to be encouraged.
- Possible opportunities need to be created for the rehabilitation of 'sick' industries.
- Quality control of industrial products needs to be more effective.
- Environmental balance needs to be maintained through pollution control in industries.

The national industrial policy does not conflict with forestry activities. But industries may overuse forestry resources and, in the absence of any land-use policy, they may compete with forestry for land.

4.5 Conflicts and Compatibility between the Various National Policies

Forestry is primarily land oriented. As yet, there is no land-use policy in Bangladesh. Thus land laws and land reforms, which are formulated mostly in relation to agriculture and industry, sometimes contradict forest policy. For example, there is no bar to establishing industries in or adjoining a forest, to converting forest land to agricultural land, or to establishing fisheries in mangrove forests.

There is also a lack of coordination between the Land Administrating Agency and the Forest Department, especially at the field level. The Deputy Commissioners deal with issues related to land on behalf of the Land Ministry. Under the existing set-up in Bangladesh, the Deputy

Commissioners are very powerful and often ignore forestry or environmental aspects of land use. They are more interested in leasing land to private persons without any consideration for its capacity. Much forest land has already been converted to non-forestry use, which is against the forest policy. For example, mangroves are leased out for fisheries, and sloping hill tracts are leased out for horticulture, farming, or rubber plantations. Such acts often lead to conflicts with the Forest Department, but since the Deputy Commissioners are powerful bureaucrats, they are hardly ever questioned by authorities higher up in the government.

Since the Industrial Policy of 1991 emphasised the establishment of export-oriented joint ventures, steps have been taken to use various forest products as raw materials for such industries and to enhance cooperation between industry and forestry.

The Agricultural Extension Policy and the Environment Policy are compatible with the Forestry Policy. The National Water Policy, by laying emphasis on erosion control and afforestation, has actually enhanced work proposed under the Forest Policy.