

Chapter 8

Development Projects, Displacement and Settlement of Hill and Plains' People

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 the CHTs. The artificial Kaptai Lake, created from the construction of the dam, submerged 250 square miles (65,000 ha) of prime farming land, accounting for 40 per cent (approximately 22,000 ha) of total cultivable land. It was possessed mainly by hill people. This severely disrupted the population-resources balance and required the resettlement and 'rehabilitation' of those displaced. The Karnaphuli reservoir uprooted 100,000 people, which accounted for more than a quarter of the total CHT population (Roy 1995).

Estimates of the size of the displaced population differ. Before the dam was constructed the would-be displaced persons were estimated at 80,000. Of them 45,500 were listed as primarily plough cultivators. The rest were mainly *jhum* cultivators. However, a large number of hill people was indirectly connected with plough cultivation. The actual number of affected plough cultivators was, therefore, much larger than

the figure shown. A total of 18,000 families was uprooted. Of these, 8,000 families, mainly *jhumia*, did not have recognised land rights. Although they had farmed the hillsides before the flooding, only a fraction of those who had legitimate land rights could fulfill the documentary and other requirements laid down by the Board of Revenue.

The government could not provide the same amount of land as that lost to the reservoir. The Forest Department did not like the dereservation of reserve forest. Ultimately, it limited dereservation to 23,000 acres (9,300 ha) of which 10,000 acres (4,000 ha) was 'flat land suitable for cultivation'. Another 500–1,000 acres (200–400 ha) of flat forest land were dereserved when the dam was completed. Each family had held on average six acres (2.4 ha) of prime agricultural land before the flooding. The maximum amount of land offered to those rehabilitated was only three acres (1.2 ha).

Under the rehabilitation plan the displaced were offered the choice to (1) move to higher

ground within their own *mduja* or one nearby, or (2) move from the vicinity of the reservoir to (a) Kassalong Rehabilitation Area, (b) unreclaimed flat land in the upper Chengri and Myani Valleys, or (c) some other part of the district. According to Sopher (1963) there was manipulation by Bengali officers to induce choices in certain directions. Also, those hill people displaced who were not Chakma had to submit to choices made by the Chakma. Displaced Bengali cultivators were said to have been given special consideration. The largest contingent of plains' people (570 families) were settled on the best land—'2,000 acres of level, previously cleared land that was about ready for ploughing, near the bazaar and administrative headquarters of Marishya' (Sopher 1963). Of the total displaced, 52 per cent stayed in the vicinity of the reservoir, 29 per cent moved to Kassalong, 14 per cent to Chengri-Myani Valley, and five per cent moved elsewhere.

The results of population dislocation were that hill people lost their lands; ecology, geography, economy, and agriculture were changed; habitat was severely disturbed; and a new era of political instability took root. Many hill people who had previously been plough cultivators resumed *jhum* cultivation with no other option open to them but subsistence.

8.1 Settlement Projects

There have been several attempts to settle *jhumias* and landless farmers in villages in CHTs (TPR 1987). A brief description of early projects follows.

8.1.1 Karnaphuli Rehabilitation Scheme (1957-1966)

The first settlement programme was started in 1957 with the aim of resettling people affected by the Karnaphuli Reservoir Project. This rehabilitation scheme settled around 15,074 families between 1957 and

1966. The original plan was to allot one acre (0.4 ha) per person up to a maximum of 10 acres (4 ha) per family for lowland agriculture. However, the land allotment plan was rarely achieved. As there was a shortage of suitable agricultural land, part of the Kassalong Reserve Forest was dereserved. To enable newly relocated farmers to become established, grants in both cash and kind (planting materials and fertilizers) were provided.

8.1.2 Supplementary Rehabilitation Scheme (1966-1975)

The second settlement aimed at settling 6,239 *jhumia* families that had not been accommodated in the earlier scheme. By 1973, a total of 799 families had been settled in agriculture, while 3,000 families were given assistance to become fishermen around the reservoir. The fishermen were provided with boats and nylon nets.

8.2 Chittagong Hill Tracts' Development Project (1968-1979)

This project was based on a master plan drawn up by the former East Pakistan Agricultural Development Corporation, renamed the Bangladesh Agricultural Development Corporation (BADC) after 1971. Settlers received loans in cash and kind. Plots of six acres (2.4 ha) were developed on a standard pattern consisting of bananas, pineapples, cashew nuts, and mixed fruit trees. The project commenced operation in 1968-69. In 1974, control was transferred from BADC to the newly formed Horticultural Development Board (HDB). Between 1968-73, 1,702 families were settled with only 41 subsequently abandoning their holdings. The loan repayment rate during this period was 95 per cent. After a lapse of four years between 1972 and 1976, HDB restarted its settlement programme and, by late-1978, had established 1,494 new settlers.

8.2.1 Joutha Khamar Settlement Scheme (1976-1983)

This was a programme of the Chittagong Hill Tracts' Development Board (CHTDB). The scheme aimed at settling landless *jhumia* based on activities in horticulture, fisheries, and livestock. One thousand five hundred and forty families were settled during the period from 1976-1983: 1,070 in horticulture, 450 in fisheries, and 20 in livestock production. Agricultural farm settlers were allotted five acres (2 ha) of land per family.

8.2.2 Upland Settlement Project

The Upland Settlement Project under the CHTDB was a major component of the Chittagong Hill Tracts' Multisectoral Development Project, comprised of 11 components, in 1979. The Asian Development Bank financed the project. The project settled 2,000 landless tribal families in 39 villages between 1985 and 1991 (Khisa 1995). Each family settled was allotted permanent and heritable rights of 2.5 ha of upland (0.1 ha for homestead, 0.8 ha for agroforestry practice, and 1.6 ha for rubber cultivation). The families were provided with social facilities and technical and financial assistance. Economic opportunities were created by establishing 3,200 ha of rubber plantations and four rubber-processing plants. With the success of the project, the CHTDB has started the second phase.

8.2.3 Integrated *Jhumia* Rehabilitation and Afforestation Programme

The programme was one of the components of the Chittagong Hill Tracts' Multisectoral Development Project executed by the Forest Department. It encouraged planting of bamboo and agroforestry. It arranged equitable distribution of income between the government and the settlers

from the harvesting of timber from afforested areas as well as supporting cottage and rural industries. The overall strategy was to:

- settle *jhumia* in villages with land allotments of from 1.6–2.4 ha,
- establish forest plantations where *jhumia* were allowed to use *taungya* or agroforestry to produce food crops,
- develop infrastructure to facilitate transportation, and
- establish market channels for agricultural products.

The project rehabilitated 3,245 *jhumia* families in seven forest divisions in the form of villages (at least 50 families in each village) in hilly arable lands between 1984 and 1989 (Chakma 1994). Each family was given title to five acres (2 ha) of land: 0.5 acres (0.2 ha) for homestead and agriculture, 0.5 acres (0.2 ha) for bamboo and cane cultivation, 2.7 acres (1.1 ha) for horticulture, and 1.3 acres (0.5 ha) for cultivation of miscellaneous plants. Social and community facilities, such as school, prayer centre, approach road, and internal road/pathways, within the villages were developed by the project.

8.4 Plains' People Settlement Programmes

In 1979, the government made a change in the land law of CHTs. An amendment maintained most of the provisions of the 1971 legislation, but with one important omission, namely, the restriction with regard to settlement of CHT land to outsiders. The government sought to provide five acres (2 ha) of hilly land, four acres (1.6 ha) of 'mixed' (plain and gently sloping) land, and 2.5 acres (1 ha) of paddy land to each settling family from the plains in the early 1980s. In the first phase, 25,000 families were brought to CHTs. A few square miles of reserve forest were released for settlement. As for the hill people, many

thousands were uprooted and many thousands lost their land for the second time (Roy 1992).

8.5 Impact

The programme of afforestation could not achieve the level of success desired, and it suffered from inadequate participation of the target group, mainly due to political unrest. Lack of motivation, education, extension, infrastructure, marketing facilities, and, above all, the lack of material/financial incentives were also constraints (FMP, 1993). Except in a few cases, rehabilitated families had been leading a better life previously (Chakma 1994).

8.6 Case Study in Khagrachari District

The research team carried out a quick and small sample survey among four major ethnic groups in Khagrachari hill district. Its aim was to look at the socioeconomic realities of ethnic inhabitants in a hill district. The sample included 20 Chakma households, 15 Marma households, 15 Tripura households, and 20 Bengali households.

8.6.1 Homestead Land

Distribution of homestead land appears to be highly skewed, and, in a large majority of cases, they are tiny parcels of land not suitable for horticulture and agroforestry activities (Annex 1, Table 1). Those households that possess a sizable parcel of homestead land plant both fruit trees and wood trees around their houses. These households also earn income by selling the products of their homestead garden. Five Chakma households and one Bengali household in the sample possess no homestead land. These households are temporarily squatting on *khas* land. However, both poor and well-off households fall into this category. Poor households are mostly day labourers, while well-off

households are white-collar employees such as school teachers and traders. Better-off households have rented houses in Khagrachari town.

Five categories of tenurial rights over homestead land were observed: non-owner, owner, leasehold, squatting, and occupancy. The distinctions among these categories, especially between non-owners and squatters, are blurred. Some squatters, who are *de jure* non-owners, have claimed the homestead land on which they reside as their own. This is because they have been squatting over a long period without facing any questions about their stay on the land. Leaseholders received land from the district authorities under the Regulation of 1900. However, they cannot claim to have full ownership as they need to get permission for selling the land from relevant authorities. The most interesting tenurial rights over homestead land have been found among the Tripura (Annex 1, Table 2). Except three non-responses, all claimed to have occupancy rights over land; this means that they enjoy customary rights over their homestead land that are not challenged by anybody.

This picture reveals that there are constraints of custom and law over the development of full-blown private property rights over homestead land. It can be claimed that the market in homestead land in CHTs is underformed. The most interesting question that remains unanswered is why, despite underdevelopment of the homestead land market, is the distribution so skewed?

8.6.2 Agricultural Land

Distribution of agricultural land is highly skewed among the four ethnic groups (Annex 1, Table 3). All groups have households that possess no agricultural land. However, the worst group is Bengalis, followed by Tripura, Chakma, and Marma in sequence. There are wealthy landown-

ers among all three tribal groups. Most households in the upper land bracket have reported leasing out land for sharecropping. No input-sharing or cash-renting practices were observed. In most cases, land-owning households reported two major rice crops: Aus and Aman. One interesting feature of the sharecropping practice of tribal households is that owners retain 40 per cent of the output, while 60 per cent is given to the sharecropper. This is a departure from the standard practice of 50-50 sharing of output and is difficult to explain in the absence of input-sharing by the landowner. However, it can be hypothesised tentatively that poor land fertility and unfavourable terrain may explain this unusual practice. Almost all households prepare seedbeds for plantation of rice saplings. Most also report using chemical fertilizers. Shortage of cattle among hill residents explains this phenomenon. Existence of a large number of households among the Bengalis not owning any agricultural land can be explained by the fact that most of these households are recent settlers. They have simply been settled there by the government without allotting them any agricultural land. They subsist on government grain rations. The tenure system (Annex 1, Table 4) simply shows the dichotomy between owners and non-owners. Intermediate groups, such as leaseholders and squatters, are not found. The absence of leaseholders could be a sampling peculiarity, while squatting is not seen because of an anathema towards this practice in respect to cultivation.

8.6.3 Fruit Trees

Sampled households of all ethnic groups have planted a large variety of fruit trees on their homestead land (Annex 1, Table 5). In addition to providing fruit for household consumption and for exploiting market opportunities, fruit trees help soil conservation. The dry branches, twigs, and leaves are used as fuel for cooking pur-

poses. The practice of planting fruit trees is thus environmentally friendly.

8.6.4 Sources of Fuelwood

Three sources of fuelwood were reported: forest, market, and own-source (Annex 1, Table 6). Tribals use all three, while Bengalis are essentially market-dependent. Own-source is insignificant. The peri-urban (nearer to Khagrachari town) households show a preponderance to the market source, while distant (distant from Khagrachari) Tripura households report only forest and own-source. It seems the market in fuelwood is quite developed in urban and peri-urban areas.

8.6.5 Domestic Animals

The number of domestic animals owned by the households indicates the vitality of subsistence agriculture, not to mention commercial agriculture. Sampled households are poor in domestic animal resources (Annex 1, Table 7). Among Tripura households, domestic animals are more frequently owned. As the Tripura settlement is far from the urban fringe, it has the advantage of access to grazing. Annex 1, Table 8 shows the ownership pattern of poultry and presents a rather encouraging picture. Since keeping poultry is not dependent upon land-ownership or having access to common grazing land, the homestead fringe is adequate for supporting poultry.

8.6.6 Common Property Resources

The tribal ethnic groups exploit common property products from the forest (Annex 1, Table 9) for domestic consumption. Some households exploit these resources to market for profit. The Bengalis do not report use of these resources. Although the amount of such products for consumption may not be significant, their importance cannot be denied as a source of nutrition.

The products include a variety of vegetables, mushrooms, jungle potatoes, and frogs.

8.6.7 Income Formation

As Annex 1, Table 10 shows, sampled households derive income from diverse sources. Income has been estimated on a gross basis and is consequently a little high. The category of 'other income' represents income from sources such as trading and white-collar jobs. As expected, Chakma and Bengalis have a high level of income from 'other' sources which can be explained by a high level of literacy among them. Marma and Tripura are more agriculture-dependent. Zero income has been reported from horticulture, although most groups possess homestead fruit gardens from which they do derive some income. Non-availability of reliable price figures for imputing income

from horticulture has dissuaded us from including this source, and income from poultry has also been excluded because of the problem of reliability. Bengalis do not derive income from sources such as wild products, brewing wine, craft activities, and handloom. In US-dollar terms, the mean gross income of a Chakma household is \$ 2,469.70, of a Marma household \$ 709, of a Tripura household \$ 949.5, and of a Bengali household \$ 3,778.72 (\$1= 48.00 BDT). This is for one year. In per capita terms, the income of a Chakma is \$ 474.94, of a Marma \$ 136.35, of a Tripura \$ 182.66, and of a Bengali \$ 726.67. In net terms, this gross estimate would come down by approximately one third. It must be noted that this is a quick survey and these are only rough estimates. The Bangladesh Economic Survey for 1997-1998 showed a national per capita income of \$ 268 for Bangladesh as a whole.