

# 1 Introduction

Bangladesh is situated in the north-eastern part of south Asia at the foot of the southern Himalayan slopes. It lies between 20°34' and 26°36' north and 88°1' and 92°41' east. The uplands (hills and mountains) of Bangladesh are situated in the eastern, south-eastern, and north-eastern parts. They are composed of tertiary hills and mountains and are extensions of the Hindu Kush-Himalayas. The hill areas include the districts of Rangamati, Bandarban, and Khagrachari in the east; Chittagong and Coxes Bazaar in the south-east; and Sylhet and some parts of Mymensing in the north. The most contiguous and largest area of hills is the Chittagong Hill Tracts, which comprise the districts of Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban, ninety per cent of which are hilly or mountainous (Khisra 1991).

Bangladesh is a small country of only 144,110 sq.km. with a population of over 120 million (a population density of people per sq.km.). The extremely high population pressure has resulted in 'land hunger' and triggered encroachment on government forest land. Under the traditional type of forest management practised by the Forest Department, the forest cover in many areas has

gradually been depleted. Forest land is being encroached on in many locations, while the Forest Department is raising new plantations, mostly on denuded tracts of land under their control.

Forest management in Bangladesh, like other developing countries, is facing problems of sustainability and equity. The Forest Department, through its custodial approach, has failed miserably during the past decades to protect the country's forest resources. There has been rampant pilferage of forest products from government forest land, especially in the northern and central part of the country, and increased encroachment. New technological innovations for multiple production from forest resources have not been applied effectively because of conflicts with people residing in and around the forests. This has made policy-makers realise the need to introduce alternative approaches to forest management. In the 1980s, the Forest Department started to adopt participatory forestry practices and initiated benefit-sharing arrangements in forestry activities with local people. This practice of social or participatory forestry is showing encouraging results.