

Local Resources of Chittagong Hill Tracts Present Status and Prospects

Zahirul Alam*

1. Introduction

This paper attempts to review the present status and prospects of local resources of Chittagong Hill Tracts and prepared based on personnel experience, visits, and information collected both from primary and secondary sources.

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) is a 13,295 sq.km region of hills consisting of Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachair districts located in the south-east of Bangladesh. As per the Population Census 2001, the total population of CHT is 1,325 million, of which about 52 percent are tribal people. Thirteen different tribes with different languages and cultures live in the CHT. Historically the Chittagong Hill Tracts enjoyed the status of a self-governing territory and administered by Hill King until the British East India Company annexed Bengal in 1787. The Chakma Raja (King) then signed an agreement after a long armed conflict, under which Chakma territory became a British tributary on the payment of 20 tons of cotton per annum. This was later extended to other parts of CHT. In 1860, the British formally annexed CHT and upgraded its status to a full-fledged district. Subsequently, regulations were promulgated in the form of CHT Manual to regulate administrative affairs of the region in 1900. The current civil, revenue and judicial administration of the CHT substantially draws on the spirit of these regulations.

The major events of CHT history in next phases are (1) construction of 666 meters long and 43 meters high hydro-electric dam of Kaptai in 1957-62 which caused submergence of 54,000 acres of arable land, hardship and out-migration of local population; and (2) the CHT Peace Accord between the Government of Bangladesh and PCJSS (Parbotto Chattagram Jono Sanghati Samity) which provided decommissioning of areas, formation of Land Commission to settle local land disputes and decentralization of authority to the CHT local government.

* Executive Director, Integrated Development Foundation

Chittagong Hill Tracts was very rich in forest resources till the dam was built in Kaptai on Karnafully River. As an impact of creation of lake, population growth, conflict between the PLJSS and the Government, illegal and un-planned cutting of trees from the forests and lack of re-plantation have made many hills barren. The area was also endowed with various fruits and bamboos. But it was very difficult to market them due to very poor communication system.

2. Local Resources

The major local resources of Chittagong Hill Tracts are reviewed in this paper. These are (1) Land, (2) Agriculture, (3) Forest, (4) Kaptai Lake and fisheries, (5) Tourism and (6) Bamboo.

2.1 Land

The whole CHT can be divided into four specific divisions by valleys formed by the rivers Karnafully, Sangu, Matamuhuri and Feni and tributaries. These valleys are the Chengi, Kasalong, Rankhyang, Sangu and Matamuhuri. The hills surrounded by these valleys ranges from 30 meters to 915 meters. The hills, valleys and cliffs are covered with dense bamboos, trees and creeper Jungle. The hills are located along the boundary with Tripura and Mizoram states of India in the North and East and with Myanmar in the southwest. The terrain is the largest mountainous region of the country. It covers 1.32 million hectare, which is about 10% of the total area of the country. Approximately 90% of the area is hilly to mountainous. The mountains are steep and difficult to ascend. Valleys and steep

Table 1 : Categorization of Land

Category-	Nature-	Area-	%
A-Suitable for cultivation-		76,466	3.24
B-Located at the edges of hills, and mountain can be cultivated by preparing terrace		67,871	2.88
C-Located at the edges of hills; and mountain can be cultivated by preparing terrace		3,66,622	15.53
C-D-Located at the top of the mountains, and can be made suitable for agriculture	32,024	1.36	
D-Not suitable for cultivation, afforestation is possible in this area		1,816,930	76.99
	Total	2,359,913	100.00

hills restrict the mobility and impede movement of essential utilities to remote areas. Visibility is also restricted due to hills and dense shrubs.

The total area of CHT is about 3.26 million acres, of which 75% are not suitable for cultivation. A survey undertaken in May 1966 covered about 2.36 million acres of land which are categorized in the following ways:

The major rules for land administration and management as per CHT Manual 1900 are described below:

Rules-10: The Deputy Commissioner acts both as Deputy Commissioner and District Judge;

Rules-12: Transfer of land in any form, mortgage etc. must be registered;

Rules-20: Deputy Commissioner or his representative will act as Registration Officer;

Rules-34: Rules on Lease transfer and sublet of Government Land is as follows:

A (i) A maximum of 5.00 acres of land can be allotted to a hilly or non-hilly family as lease Deputy Commissioner. An additional amount of 5.00 acres grove land could be leased out to the same family. The Deputy Commissioner could also provide additional 5.00 acres of grove land if he finds the activities of the family are satisfactory. But the amount of total allotment of grove land must not exceed 10.00 acres.

A(ii) Grove land shall be approved by the Deputy Commissioner and shall remain tax-free in first 3 years and this type of land could be classified as 3rd class land and later could be charged tax accordingly. Grove land

The mountainous land comparatively with low altitude and suitable for orchard or other plantation/gardens.

34 (1) No lands either agriculture or grove land can be leased out (allotted) to non-residents of CHT.

34(1)(b)(i): For establishing commercial rubber or other plantation or gardens, Deputy Commissioner can provide long term lease of maximum 25.00 acres, while this limit is maximum 100.00 acres in case Commissioner. Approval from the Land Ministry is required if the amount exceeds 100.00 acres.

- 34(1)C(i) The Deputy Commissioner can lease out maximum of 10.00 acres outside municipal area and 5.00 acres within municipal area for establishing industry to either permanent or non-permanent residents. The non-permanent residents will pay 100% and permanent residents will pay 50% of market price as lease money for this land.
- C (ii) The amount of tax to be paid per year is 0.5% of the market price of the land.
- D(i)(ii) The Deputy Commissioner can also lease out for residential purpose in the same way. But the family is not required to pay lease-money if the land is in rural area. The annual tax in this case is 0.25% of the market price of the land.
- D(iii) The Deputy Commissioner can not lease out for residential purpose more than 0.30 acres in urban area without permission of the Ministry.
- Rules-37: All the lands except reserve-forest will be divided into “Mouza”. The area of Mouza will be demarcated by the Deputy Commissioner.
- Rules-40: Administrative Authority of Circle Chief and Headman:
Mouza headman is responsible for mitigating all disputes in the Mouza as per their law. He can fine maximum of Tk. 25.00 and can force to return theft goods. In such a case circle chief can fine maximum of Tk. 50.00.
- Circle Chief & Headman:
In 1900, CHT was divided into 4 circles. These are- (i) Chakma Circle, (ii) Bomang circle, (iii) Maung circle and (iv) government Reserve Forest. The Rajas of each Circle is Circle Chief. He is assisted by Mouza Chief who are called Headman. Headman are assisted Karbari and Roaja at Para level.
- Rules 41: Control of Jhum Cultivation: The Deputy Commissioner controls the Jhum cultivation. He can stop the Jhum cultivation.
- Rules 41(A) Headman is responsible for the maintenance of resources and wealth of the mouza.
- Rules-42: Every Jhum cultivator shall pay tax for Jhum land to headman.
- 42(A) Headman will maintain a registrar on Jhum related information.

42(12) Headman shall submit the Jhum register to Circle Chief on 1st June of every year and Circle Chief shall submit them to Deputy Commissioner on 1st August of every year.

Rules-48: The Deputy Commissioner shall appoint and dismiss Headman in consultation with Circle Chief.

Rules-50(1) Headman can allot a maximum of 0.30 acres of Khas land to a hilly person in his Mouza in rural area.

At present, clearance from District Council is also required for the transfer and registration of any land in Chittagong Hill Tracts.

The majority of the people particularly poor tribal poor are not aware of land ownership and the process of getting land from the government on lease. As a result majority of them do not own land. However, they take land from the headman for Jhum cultivation as mentioned earlier.

We found in some places that the government rehabilitated tribal families with 5.00 acres of land, but most of them sold them out and became landless again. This was mainly because the programme did not immediately provided rehabilitation support (financial & technical). Another great problem in the CHT with land is proper demarcation of land. Most cases the area mentioned in the ownership title does not match with the possession. There are cases that some influential people possess land without ownership title.

Therefore, a total extensive survey of land is very important. This will not only help to resolve many local land related conflicts, but also will help to rehabilitate displaced families through proper distribution of land.

2.2 Agriculture

There are mainly 4 types farming in the CHT. These are, (i) Jhum cultivation; (ii) Cultivation at the hill-side plains; (iii) Cultivation in Lake-side land; (iv) Fruits and vegetables in high and mountains land.

Jhum Cultivation

The main profession of tribal people in CHT was agriculture, and Jhum was the only system of agriculture production. The tribal people of CHT has been cultivating land through this system since old days. In Jhum system, the farmers cut the shrubs, small trees and branches of big trees and just leave them at the sites. They burn them into ashes when they dry. They believe that ashes increase

the fertility of the land. They sow seeds of deferent crops in one pit, just before the rains start. They can harvest these crops one after another beginning from end of July.

Cultivation at the Hill-sides Plain

The cultivation at the hill sides plains started by non-tribal people with plough sometime in 1865. Subsequently, this system spread throughout Chittagong Hill Tracts. The farmers now use improved technology in this system.

Lake-side lands

People of Lake-area can use this land in dry season only when water-level in Kaptai Lake goes down for one crop only. The total area available from the lake during dry season is about 13,552 Rectors. People produce paddy, watermelon, vegetables etc. in this land. Crops production affects here when there is early rain or emergence of land from lake in late.

High and Mountainous land

People use their land of this category to produce vegetables and various spices and fruits. People produce verities of fruits in this type of land. These mango, jam, jack fruits, pineapple, orange, cashew-nuts, banana etc. The production of Jackfruits, pineapple and banana are huge. The production can even be increased by several folds. The people face serious problem during the season in marketing their products which bring down the price very low. A plenty of such land are unutilized & under utilized which could be developed for more production.

For getting optimum returns from this land, the following measures can be considered.

- Land survey and specific demarcation of land;
- Land Reform;
- Creation of outlets for marketing of products;
- Preservation facilities like cold-storage;
- Financial and technical support to the farmers;
- Establishment of fruits and food processing plants.

2.3 Forest

Chittagong Hill Tracts was enriched with forest resources even 50 years ago. A majority of population of this area were directly or indirectly dependent on forest for their livelihood. Forest resources were damaged severely due to Kaptai Lake and abnormal situation prevailed in the area for the last 3 decades. In many places,

the deep green forest became barren. Population growth, unemployment and lack of appropriate planning and its implementation also contributed in deforestation process. Many people think deforestation started from the day when government forest management and control system established about 150 years ago due to mainly corruption of the people involved in the system. Due to Kapatai dams, not only submerged a large part of the cultivable area but also of about 46,76 acres of reserve forest had also to de-reserved for the rehabilitation of displaced people which also damaged a large area of forest. Burning of forest for Jhum cultivation also damages the forest to a great extent. Deforestation had severely affected economy, ecology and bio-diversity of the area.

Chittagong Hill Tracts was once the safe-heaven of wildlife. This area was inhabited by various species of animals. There were about 75 species of mammals, 100 species of birds, 25 species of reptiles and 7 species of amphibians. But these animals are diminishing gradually in this area due to un-planned Jhum cultivation and rapid deforestation.

The expansion of Jhum cultivation due to increase in population has led to un-planned Jhum cultivation causing low productivity. The new settlements and habitation are also contributing to deforestation to a great extent. On the other hand, the government also does not have plan for aggressive afforestation programme. The government must take the following measures in order to protect the destruction of forest.

- Stop illegal occupation of forest land;
- Rehabilitation of Jhumia
- Jhum cultivation in a planned way without destroying forest and bio-diversity.
- Take necessary action to stop smuggle of timber from the forest
- Afforestation in barren hills and mountains should immediately be started on participatory basis involving the local poor families.
- The Development Organizations including MFIS can be involved in the afforestation programme.

2.4 Kaptai Lake and Fisheries

Kaptai Lake is an artificial lake created in 1961 due to establishment of Dam in River Karnafully. The average size of water body is 58,300 hectors with average depth of 9 meter. Kaptai Lake is very rich in local fish diversity. There are 76 types of species of fishes in Kaptai Lake of which 42 species are raised harvested commercially.

The capacity of fish production of Kaptai Lake as per its size is about 31,360 metric tons. But as per statistics of Landing Station of Fisheries Department at the Lake the amount of marketed fish per annum are about 6000 metric tons, which is about 20% of the capacity. The main problems in achieving the target are as follows:

- there was not suitable plan for fish cultivation during the creation of Lake;
- the bottom of the lake is not suitable for harvesting fish;
- the depth of the lake is very high which is not favorable for fish production.
- gradual damage of hatching place of Rue at the upper part of the lake-due to situation;
- use “current net” by the fishermen for catching fish;
- lack of supervision and protection pirates;
- illegal fishing;
- lack proper storage facility and lack of knowledge of packaging;

Measures

- (i) improvement in management and planning;
- (ii) facilities for exporting fish directly from Rangamati should be created.
- (iii) quality control, processing and cold storage facilities should be created;
- (iv) plant for producing improved dry fish in scientific way, which can also be exported.
- (v) dredging of lake in required places.

2.5 Tourism

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is a beautiful and strange piece of land with rocks, hills forests, lakes and colorful tribal life & culture. It is really beautiful combination water, hills forests and plains which easily attracts tourists both from country and abroad. The whole Chittagong Hill Tracts can be developed and decorated to make one of the most attractive tourist resorts of the world. People from Europe, America and other continents will come here to spend their holidays once we can ensure law and order safety.

2.6 Bamboo

Chittagong Hill Tracts is enriched with bamboo resources. CHTs contributes major portion in bamboo production of the country, and most of them are natural. However, there are no conservation plots or reserves bamboo forest.

Quality of the bamboo products are gradually decreasing mainly because of (i) burning of hills for Jhum cultivation; (ii) lack & complication of supervision from the forest department and (iii) irregular felling/harvest.

The government should declare reserve Bamboo sanctuaries in three hill districts and proper felling policy should be formulated in order to get good and quality harvest. The current demand and supply of bamboo estimated around 810 and 750 million respectively. The shortfall alarmingly increases by the year 2008 in 1013 due to expected large-scale death of a major forest bamboo species (*Melocanna baccifera*). Bangladesh Bamboo has good international market particularly in Middle East and Pakistan.

3. Conclusions & Recommendations

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is endowed with enormous resources, which is decaying day by day due to lack of proper planning, management and lack of agreement between the tribal leaders and the government on the strategy of the overall development of the area. The agreement between the Government and tribal leader on goals, objectives and strategy are very important for the development of the area.

A long-term strategic plan indicating present weaknesses and strengths, list of actions required for the development of the area and a detail action plan would be very helpful. Both government and tribal policy and decision makers should be involved in the process of preparation of the strategic plan. Some issues which I think would be helpful in designing strategic plan of Chittagong Hill Tracts are presented here.

3.1 Land

- implement land survey and have specific demarcation of land as in the plan land
- implement land reform and distribution of land to displaced families with support services and follow-up for its proper utilization.
- the land distributed to the displaced families shall not transferable.
- the poor and landless people of CHT should make aware on the process and importance of land ownership.

3.2 Agriculture

- Land survey and specific demarcation of land;
- Land Reform;

- Creation of outlets for marketing of products;
- Preservation facilities like cold-storage;
- Financial and technical support to the farmers;
- Establishment of fruits and food processing plants.

3.3 Forest

- Stop illegal occupation of forest land;
- Rehabilitation of Jhumia
- Jhum cultivation in a planned way without destroying forest and biodiversity.
- Take necessary action to stop smuggle of timber from the forest
- Afforestation in barren hills and mountains should immediately be started on participatory basis involving the local poor families.
- The Development Organizations including MFIS can be involved in the afforestation programme.

3.4 Kaptai Lake and Fisheries

- (vi) improvement in management and planning;
- (vii) facilities for exporting fish directly from Rangamati should be created.
- (viii) quality control, processing and cold storage facilities should be created;
- (ix) plant for producing improved dry fish in scientific way, which can also be exported.
- (x) dredging of lake in required places.

3.5 Tourism

- ensure law & order and security;
- ensure cleanliness and environment friendly public transport;
- undertake beautification scheme ;
- encourage private sector to establish holiday resorts with all possible amenities.

3.6 Bamboo

- Rehabilitation of Jhumia
- Jhum cultivation in a planned way without destroying bamboo forest.
- Supervision and maintenance of bamboo forest by the Government

References

1. UNDP and Government of Bangladesh, “Joint GOB/Donor Risk Assessment Mission Report on the Chittagong Hill Tracts”, UNDP, Dhaka, August 2002.
2. Elated by Dr. Jafar Ahmed Khan, “Rangamati Baichitrer Oikkatan”, Rangamati, Zila Proshashan, Rangamati, April, 2004.
3. IDF Annual Report 2004, Dhaka, 2004.
4. Raihan “Report on the Survey of Bamboo Resources and their utilization in Bangladesh” (mimeo), Chittagong, January 2005.
5. Hill Tracts Manual 1900.
6. AusAID, “Building Capacity for Sustainable Development in the Chittagong Hill Tracts”, AusAID (mimeo), Dhaka, August, 1999.