

A Review of Forest Policy Trends in Bangladesh

—Bangladesh Forest Policy Trends—

Md. Millat-e-MUSTAFA

Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, University of Chittagong

Abstract : Forest policy in Bangladesh has its origins in the nation's colonial past and has a distinct commercial slant. The first formal forest policy to be enunciated in what was then British India came into effect in 1894 and was characterized by the progressive commercialization of forest use for revenue maximization, expansion of agricultural land at the expense of forests for commercial farming, systematic alienation of local communities from forests, and the progressive diminution of their traditional rights. The Pakistani period of rule (1947–1971) witnessed the formation of two forest policies, in 1955 and 1962. However, this period did not differ much in essence from the colonial period, and was characterized by a similar trend towards commercialization and the consequent alienation of local communities. As such, local rights and demands remained ignored as before. Following a bloody insurgency war, Bangladesh surfaced as a sovereign state on the global map in 1971. The Government of Bangladesh adopted the first National Forest Policy in 1979 with the objective of providing greater protection and placing greater emphasis on conservation of the country's forest assets whilst concomitantly developing its rural and industrial economies. However, the policy largely ignored the crucial issue of community participation and, consequently, little changed in comparison to the traditional colonial-industrial approach to forestry. The current forest policy was introduced in 1994 and represents the first shift towards recognition of the importance of people's participation in forestry. Sustainable development, poverty alleviation, local people's participation in forest protection, and governmental support for forestry development from a broader sector of society are some of the important policy commitments of the new people-oriented forestry initiative in Bangladesh.

Key words : Forest policy, colonial, commercial, alienation, people's participation.

1 Introduction

With nearly 124 million people and a per capita annual income of US \$277 (1997), Bangladesh is one of the most densely populated developing countries of the world. Forestry represents one of the major sectors of renewable resources in Bangladesh, and contributes to both economic and ecological stability. The contribution of the forestry sector to GDP is about 3–4 per cent and the sector directly employs about 2.5 per cent of the labour force (BBS 2000). As an integral part of the Ministry of the Environment and Forests formed in 1989, the Forest Department (hereafter FD) administers the country's forest resources and manages all government forest lands.

The history of forestry in Bangladesh is one of continuous depletion of forest resources both in terms of area and quality (FMP 1994). Most deforestation in government forests has occurred due to the inadequacy of the bureaucratic custodian approach to forest management (Khan 1998). Since the early 1980s, forestry in Bangladesh has witnessed a rapid succession of social forestry programmes in an attempt to redress public alienation and to allow for wider participation of local people in forest use and management.

Forest policy in Bangladesh has been highly influenced by political change throughout the past two centuries and as such reflects the country's colonial her-

itage. The nation's forest resources and the authority over them have been centralized under the government, superseding traditional rights and communal authority. Despite this, national policy has been largely ineffective in maintaining the sector's contribution to the economy (Task Force 1987). In its determination to expand and conserve natural forests, the government has lately recognized the need for developing adequate policy and framework planning, including appropriate institutional reforms to promote people's involvement in forest management and conservation (Khan 2001). This paper aims to review and assess the trends in forest policy in Bangladesh with particular emphasis on the nature and magnitude of peoples' participation in forest management.

2 Forest resources of Bangladesh

2-1 Present status

Based on geographical location, climate, topography and management principles, the forests of Bangladesh can be broadly classified into six forest types, namely, hill forests, unclassified state forests, plain land Sal forests, mangrove forests, coastal forests and homegardens. The distribution of these different forest types is given in Table 1.

An estimated 2.46 million hectares of the total land area of the country is classified as forest, of which 2.19 million hectares is under legal government title. The remaining 0.27 million hectares is composed of privately

Table 1 Distribution of different forest types in Bangladesh.

		Area, million ha (% of total land area)	Growing stock, million m ³ (stocking, m ³ /ha) ⁺⁺
Forest type	Hill forest	0.67 (4.65)	28.32 (42.30)
	Unclassified state forest	0.72 (5.00)	Negligible (denuded)
	Plain land Sal forest	0.12 (0.83)	1.13 (0.94)
	Mangrove forest	0.57 (4.00)	13.19 (23.10)
	Coastal plantation	0.11 (0.76)	5.05 (45.90)
	Homegardens	0.27 (1.87)	54.68 (202.5)
	Total	2.46 (17.11) ⁺	-

+ rounding prevents figures from adding up exactly.

+ + refers to wood volume, not total biomass.

managed homegardens (FMP 1994). Of the total government forest land, 1.47 million hectares is under the control aegis of the FD. The rest, which comprises mainly barren hills in the Chittagong hill tracts, lies under the control of local government councils and is deemed unclassified state forest. Government forest land and homegardens together make up 17% of the potential tree growing area of the country, the lowest figure of any South Asian country (Millat-e-Mustafa 1996).

2-2 Degradation of the forest resource

The high and rapidly growing population of Bangladesh places great strain on all resources. The population of the country has leapt from 40 million in 1940, to its present figure of about 126 million and is predicted to reach 177.3 million by 2025 and 210.8 million by 2050 (Davidson 2000). Since the existing forest estate faces continual depletion, forestry is regarded as a particularly vulnerable sector. During the 1980s, the rate of forest destruction was 8,000 hectares per year. However, according to a recent survey by FAO, that rate has increased to 37,700 hectares per year. A document of a multilateral development bank reckoned the annual deforestation rate at 3.3 (Khan 2001). A recent survey conducted by USAID and CIDA suggests that 50 per cent of the nation's forests have been destroyed within the last 20 years (Huda and Roy 1999). Consequently, per capita forest land has declined from 0.035 hectares in 1969 to 0.02 hectares in 1990. Deforestation causes a decrease in catchment area water-holding capacity, increased soil erosion, and the loss of habitats and biodiversity. The cost of these impacts on the economy was

estimated at one per cent of GDP in 1990 (BBS 1999).

The forestry situation of the country is further exacerbated by the eccentric spatial distribution of the existing forest areas. Almost 27 per cent of the government forests are located in the eastern region of the country along international frontiers (hill forests). A further 23 per cent is situated in the southwestern corner of the country along the Bay of Bengal (mangrove forests). The vast flat countryside where almost the whole population live has only 0.12 million hectares (five per cent of the total forest area) of plain land Sal (*Shorea robusta*) forest. In 28 out of the 64 districts of Bangladesh there are no natural forests left (FMP 1994). Northwest Bangladesh has only about two per cent tree cover. Moreover, productivity of the existing forests is exceptionally low. ODA (1985) estimated that the productivity of mangrove forest has declined by 25% over a period of 25 years. The yield of hill forests has declined at the same rate. While major portions of the natural hill forests are inaccessible and hence either under-utilized or un-utilized, the accessible forests have been over-utilized or denuded and in parts severely encroached. Consequently the benefit ordinarily derivable even from these meager forest areas with appropriate management and development are not available to the people at present (Millat-e-Mustafa 1996). The Forest Resources Management Project estimated these government forests met only about 15 per cent of the timber and fuel wood requirements of the country (FRMP 1992).

3 Early history of forest administration in Indo-Bangladesh

Descriptions of the early forest history of the Indo-Bangladesh region are available from various sources, notably *Arthashastra of Kautilya*, written by Chanakya, the prime minister of Chandra Gupta Maurya in 321 B.C., and *Inscription of Ashoke* which dates back to 273 B.C.–236 B.C. (Dwivedi 1980). Under the rule of Chandra Gupta Maurya, a fully-fledged FD, headed by a superintendent of forest products or Kupadhyaksha, was in operation. The Kupadhyaksha was assisted by a number of Banopals, or forest guards, whose duties and responsibilities were specified by law (Kamal *et al.* 1999).

During the Maurya Empire, forests were classified under three distinct headings, namely, reserve forests, forests donated to eminent Brahmins, and public forests. Reserve forests were sub-categorized into reserve forests for the king which were tightly controlled and preserved for hunting purposes, and reserve forests for the state, which fell under the jurisdiction of the Kupadhyaksha. There is evidence that afforestation took place for specific purposes in reserve forests. Public rights to forest use were strictly regulated. It was an offence to light fires in the forest and felling of trees in state forests was prohibited. Persons caught trapping, killing or otherwise molesting birds and fish that do not prey upon other living creatures, were subject to fines of 26 silver coins. The fine was double in the case of deer and other wild animals. Above all, forest protection was official Mauryan government policy. No one was allowed to kill animals in the forests on Purnima, Chaturdashi, Amabasya and Pratipada days (Dwivedi 1980).

Following the fall of the Maurya Empire, the sub-continent was ruled first by Kushans, who were in turn succeeded by the Guptas. Although the Gupta Empire ended in the year 673 A.D., local Gupta princes continued to rule even into the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in some areas. Forests were one of the main sources of state revenue throughout the Gupta period and forest revenue collectors, termed Gaulmikas, were appointed specifically for this purpose. At this time, forests were used in particular to supply timber, elephants, bamboo, cane, natural fibres and medicinal herbs (Kamal *et al.* 1999).

During the period 800–1400, Bengal came under the rule of the Pals as the Indo-Bangladesh region was divided into a large number of individual sovereign states (Dwivedi 1980). Forestry was administered at the state level by respective FDs. Throughout this period, the effects of over-harvesting of timber, conversion of forests to alternative land uses and the impact of feudal battles in the form of fire and felling for defense together contributed to widespread forest destruction.

The sub-continent was once again unified during the Mughal period (1526–1700) as individual states were brought under central Mughal control and administered as federal states or Suba, including Bengal Suba. Agri-

culture was prioritized above forestry leading to forest clearance. In addition, Mughals gazetted forest game reserves or Sikargah, for the purpose of hunting (Dwivedi 1980). Dhaka was developed as a great ship-building center with its timber sourced from the Chittagong hill tracts (Khattak 1979).

The end of the Mughal period was followed by the arrival of the British and the establishment of the East India Company. Under colonial rule and up until the middle of the nineteenth century, forests of the sub-continent were subject to exploitation on a gigantic scale for ship-building and railway sleeper production without concern for forest preservation and development. Forest conservation began in Bengal with the appointment of M.T. Anderson as conservator of forests for the Lower Province (Bihar, Orissa, Bengal, and Assam) in 1864.

The Indian Forest Act of 1865 was the first piece of legislation to constitutionalise reserved and protected forests. In 1869, an assistant conservator of forests was appointed to select forests suitable for reservation in the Chittagong hills; by 1871, 5670 square miles (out of a total of 6882 square miles within the district) had been gazetted as government forest. In 1872, Sir William Schlich was appointed as the conservator of forests of Bengal. Five forest divisions fell under his jurisdiction, namely, Cooch Bihar, Assam, Dhaka, Chittagong and Bhagalpur (Dwivedi 1980).

Following reorganization in 1876, the Bengal Forest Department began operation through five forest divisions: Darjeeling, Palaman, Jalpaiguri, Sundarbans and Chittagong (Dwivedi 1980). Succeeding the first Indian Forest Act of 1865, a second act was promulgated in 1878. In 1893, the Chittagong Forest Division headquarters were transferred from Rangamati to Chittagong and in 1909 Chittagong Hill Tracts Division was formed by splitting up the Chittagong Division. The newly constituted Chittagong Hill Tracts Division comprised several blocks, namely, Kassalong, Rangkhiani, Sitapahar, Matamori and Sungoo with a total area of 1,065 square miles, and unclassified state forests with an area of 4,030 square miles. In 1920, the division was reorganized and reduced in size by the formation of Cox's Bazar Division, the Sungoo reserve being transferred to Chittagong Forest Division and Matamuhuri reserve to the Cox's Bazar Forest Division (Choudhury 1972).

With the partition of Bengal in 1947, Chittagong, the Chittagong hill tracts, Dhaka, Sunderbans and a small part of Assam Forest Divisions fell within the territory of Bangladesh (then East Pakistan) (Wadud 1989).

4 Organizational structure of the FD

After the liberation war of 1971, the post of inspector general of forests was established in the Bangladeshi FD, though this was soon revoked by the Government. The FD has since been headed by a chief conservator of forests (CCF) who was initially assisted by one deputy

chief conservator of forests (DCCF). At that time, the department was organized into six circles, each with its own remit of activities. These were named the central circle, the eastern circle, the plantation circle, the development circle, the wildlife circle and a general administration circle ; all were placed under the direct command of the CCF and each circle was headed by a conservator of forests (CF). There were several forest divisions under each circle and each division was headed by a divisional forest officer (DFO), who was a deputy conservator of forests (DCF). DFOs were assisted by an assistant conservator of forests (ACF). Within each division, a range forest officer (RFO) or range officer (RO) was placed in charge of the geographical range allocated to that division. Ranges were divided into a number of forest beats which were the responsibility of a deputy ranger or a forester. A beat was the lowest administrative unit of the forest administration and management.

This organizational structure was in place until the implementation of the 1979 forest policy which instigated a reorganization of the FD. Under the new structure, the CCF was directly assisted by three DCCFs, with responsibility over development planning, management planning and forest extension respectively. In addition, the CCF was assisted by one CF and five assistant chief conservator of forests (ACCF), each equivalent in rank to the DCF and other staff. The circles also underwent a change of name (becoming the Rangamati circle, the eastern circle, the central circle, the Bogra circle, the Jessore circle, and the plantation circle) and two additional units were formed : the forestry development and training centre, and the general administration and wildlife centre. Several new forest Divisions were introduced. Some forest divisions were divided into two or more sub-divisions, each under a sub-divisional forest officer (SDFO), an officer of higher rank than that of an assistant conservator of forests. There were no major changes in other administrative units.

5 Forest policies of Bangladesh

5-1 Historical perspective

The forest policy of Bangladesh has been highly influenced by political changes that have occurred in the country over a long period of history. After several preliminary steps, the first policy statement was issued in British India in 1894, which was modified in 1904. Following the partition of British India in 1947, the Government of Pakistan (including East Pakistan which became Bangladesh in 1971) declared its forest policy in 1955, which was again modified in 1962. After the liberation of Bangladesh in 1971, the first Bangladesh forestry conference was held in 1977, signifying an awakening for national forestry and a growing concern for forests and various aspects of their management. The Government of Bangladesh declared its first forest policy in 1979 and the second and current forest policy in 1994. The salient

features of the forest policies are outlined below.

5-2 Forest policy of 1894

British India's first forest policy was enacted in Circulation No. 22-F dated the 19th October 1894, which laid down public benefit - mainly as a source of revenue of the state - as the sole objective for the management of public forests by restricting the rights and privileges of their users. Other important directives of the policy were :

- to maintain forests in hilly areas for the preservation of climatic and physical conditions, and for the protection of cultivated land in the plains below from siltation, soil erosion, floods etc., as well as the general devastating effects of torrents ;
- to convert forest areas into agricultural land wherever an effective demand for cultivable land exists, thus giving preference to agriculture over forestry ;
- to allow people to satisfy their requirements from second class state forests capable of producing only small timber, fuelwood and fodder, given that the first object of management should be the perpetuation of the forest and the second should be the continued supply of forest products for the greater advantage and convenience of the people.

5-3 Forest policy of 1955

Since the forest policy of 1894 had been framed for the 19th century forest resource - in rich, pre-partitioned India - a reassessment of policy was required following the establishment of Pakistan as an independent state to better address the needs of the contemporary situation. The 1894 forest policy was, therefore, re-oriented on 12th November 1955. The important policy statements were as follows :

- forests should be classified on the basis of their utility and forestry should be given a high priority in national development plans ;
- provision should be made to manage all forests under working plans ;
- canal banks, roadsides, railway tracks and waste lands should be brought under the new plantation programme ;
- the beneficial aspects of forestry should be given precedence over commercial motives ;
- timber harvesting techniques should be improved to reduce waste ;
- necessary powers should be given to control land-use under a coordinated program of soil conservation and land utilization in areas subject to or threatened with soil erosion ;
- habitat protection and improvement should be given priority to protect and conserve wildlife ;
- a properly constituted forest service of fully trained staff should be made responsible for the implementation of forest policy.

5-4 Forest policy of 1962

The final piece of forest legislation issued whilst Bangladesh remained a constituent of Pakistan was enunciated in letter number F.4-30/62-P4 from the Ministry of Agriculture and Works, Food and Agriculture Division, dated the 20th June 1962. The policy had five foci, namely, forestry, watershed management, farm forestry, range management, and soil conservation. Policy directives for range management and soil conservation were applicable to areas that are now in Pakistan. The 1962 forest policy emphasized the following :

- to manage forests intensively and as a commercial concern ;
- to improve utilization of forest products to reduce rotation, and promote regeneration so as to keep pace with increased harvesting ;
- to develop plantations in government-owned waste lands by transferring these to the jurisdiction of the FD ;
- to conserve soil on a priority basis in forests and private lands ;
- to conduct research on fast growing commercial species for each ecological zone to encourage farm forestry ;
- to initiate pilot projects for the cultivation of trees on saline land and water logged areas.

5-5 Forest policy of 1979

The first national forest policy of Bangladesh was redefined in 1979 (Gazette Notification No. 1/For-1/77/345, 8 July 1979), eight years after independence. This forest policy received considerable input from the discussion in the first Bangladesh National Forestry Conference held in Dhaka in 1977 (Pant 1990). Important policy statements were as follows :

- forests shall be carefully preserved and scientifically managed for qualitative improvement ;
- all Government forests shall be designated as national forests and these forests shall not be used for any non-forestry purposes ;
- horizontal expansion of forests shall be made on the new land formation along the coastal belt and offshore areas, on the depleted hills of unclassified state forest land and on suitable khas (government owned fallow lands) of the country ;
- the tree wealth of the country shall be improved by large scale plantations conducted with mass participation ;
- optimum extraction and utilization of forest products shall be carried out to meet the requirements of the people and the country using modern technology ;
- measures to set up new forest based industries and to meet raw material requirements shall be adopted ;
- forestry research, education and training shall be organized to meet scientific, technological and administrative needs ;
- the forestry sector shall be organized to constitute a separate administrative unit of the government and relevant laws shall be updated for implementing forest

policy ;

- effective measures shall be taken to ensure conservation of the natural environment and wildlife and for utilizing the recreational potential of forests ;
- mass motivation programmes shall be initiated and technical assistance extended to those interested in forestry.

5-6 Forest policy of 1994

Representing an amendment of the forest policy of 1979, current national forest policy was enacted in 1994 and officially announced on 31st May 1995 (Bangladesh Gazette, July 6, 1995, pp 241-244). The policy was formulated to initiate a 20-year Forestry Master Plan (FMP). The Government of Bangladesh, assisted by the Asian Development Bank and the United Nations Development Program, prepared the FMP to preserve and develop the nation's forest resources. The plan provides a framework for optimizing the forestry sector's ability to stabilize environmental conditions and assist economic and social development. As such, three imperatives were identified : sustainability, efficiency and people's participation (FMP 1994). These imperatives are in tune with Agenda 21 forest principles, adopted at the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, held in Brazil in 1992 (Khan 2001).

5-6-1 Objectives of the 1994 National Forestry Policy

The main objectives of the 1994 National Forest Policy are :

- to afforest about 20% of the total area of the country by initiating various afforestation programmes in forest lands, fallow lands, lands not useful for agriculture, hinter lands and other possible areas to meet the basic needs of the present and future generations and to ensure greater contribution of the forestry sector to economic development ;
- to enrich biodiversity in the existing degraded forests by conserving the remaining natural habitats of birds and animals ;
- to strengthen agriculture by extending assistance to those sectors related with forest development, especially by conserving land and water resources ;
- to fulfill national responsibilities and commitments by implementing various efforts and government ratified agreements relating to global warming, desertification and the control of trade and commerce of wild birds and animals ;
- to prevent illegal occupation of forest lands, illegal tree felling and hunting of wild animals through the promotion of participation of local people ;
- to encourage effective use and utilization of forest products at various stages of processing ;
- to provide for and implement afforestation programmes on both public and private lands.

5-6-2 Statements of the 1994 National Forestry Policy

The policy statements which are most relevant to participatory forestry are as follows :

- community forestry and socially oriented leasehold forestry will be promoted by giving priority to poorer communities and poorer members of the community in the allocation of leasehold contracts ;
- women and poor people who do not have a land-based source of livelihood will be employed on a priority basis in nurseries, plantations, forest management, harvesting and industrial work ;
- tree growing by communities, local groups or individual families on roadsides, windbreaks, canal/river banks and other public or marginal lands will be promoted through NGOs and relevant state agencies ;
- plantations on farms and private lands will be managed according to the priorities set by their owners or duly authorized tree growers ;
- buffer zones attached to protected areas may be allocated for tree farming and agroforestry on a long term lease basis ;
- the State will provide technical assistance and financial support to promote all forms of homestead forestry ;
- industries located in rural areas, particularly those cottage and small scale labour intensive industries which contribute to the local economy and process wood and other forest based raw materials, will be promoted by the State ;
- the funds to be made available through international development assistance will be increasingly directed to support involvement of tree farmers and other producers in reforestation and forest and tree-based rural development ;
- the FD is responsible for protection and management of the national forests but in areas under high demand the needs of local people will be accommodated through participatory management ;
- the traditional rights of people living within and adjacent to designated forest areas will be maintained and their forest-related cultural values and religious beliefs will be respected ;
- the State shall modify land-use, agricultural, industrial, trade, fiscal and other policies and related legislation in order to discourage deforestation and promote farm forestry ;
- the FD will be re-structured and strengthened to support social forestry.

6 Trends in forest policy related to local participation

The historical development and evolution of public forest policy and practice in the Indian sub-continent (including Bangladesh) manifest two interrelated trends : i) state-sponsored commercialization of forestry and ii) progressive alienation of forest based communities from forest use and management (Khan 2001). British India's

first forest policy was enunciated in 1894, which laid down public benefit as the sole objective of management of public forests. It also made clear that "royalties for the Government must be collected for various facilities enjoyed by people" (Rahman 1993). These facilities included limited concessions for pasturage and fuel wood collection. Rahman argues that "the main aim ... was to collect revenue and to satisfy the local population by granting so-called rights and concessions" (Rahman 1993). Forestry was considered an obstacle to agricultural development and, as such, it was proposed that the demand for cultivable land would be met, to some extent, by clearance of forested areas, thus giving preference to agriculture over forestry. This gave renewed impetus to the process of land clearing that had long been active in Bengal, causing considerable deforestation (Khan 2001). At the same time, there was no attempt to improve forest management in general.

The independence of India and the formation of Pakistan in 1947 brought about little change in the nature of forest use and management. The Pakistani period (1947-1971) was both the outcome and a continuation of the colonial rule, and exhibited similar characteristics (Khan 2001). The period witnessed the formation of two forest policies. Though apparently devised to cater to the needs of the newly independent nation, the forest policy of 1955 manifested all the characteristics of the colonial administration, including the expansion of state territories ; extraction of timber ; fortification of bureaucracy by increasing training and manpower ; and managing all forests through rigid departmental plans (Hussain 1992). A revised policy launched in 1962 stated that : "...the management of forests shall be intensified as a commercial concern. ..utilization of forest products is to be improved... and regeneration speeded up to keep pace with increased harvesting. ..irrigated plantations primarily for the production of industrial wood are to be developed ..and timber harvesting in Chittagong and Sunderbans is to be accelerated.."

Thus the exclusion of the public from government policy-making and procedure, an emphasis on maximum economic return from forest assets, state patronization of forest-based industries, and maximum exploitation and expansion of state proprietorship over forests were the main features of forest policy during this period. Local rights and demands remained ignored as before.

Bangladesh surfaced as a sovereign state on the global map in 1971 following a historic civil war of independence. The first forest policy under independent rule was announced in 1979. In this policy, forestry as a sector of the economy was viewed as a government affair, despite the fact that some 70 per cent of all forest products originated on lands outside the control of the FD (Millat-e-Mustafa 1996). Several crucial aspects received little or inadequate mention, including : functional classification and use of forest lands ; the role of forests as the biological foundation of sustained natural productivity ; com-

munity participation ; the role of the private sector ; processing and utilization of forest products ; the organization of forest-based growth centres ; enterprise development ; rural energy needs ; involvement of voluntary organizations ; the importance of non-wood forest products ; and forestry extension. Thus rural forestry and local people were paid no particular attention, except in the form of a vague call for a “mass motivational drive for tree planting”. In fact, the policy “expressed the views of the traditional foresters, overlooking the overall development strategy” (Roy 1987), and was hardly adequate for addressing the current needs and crises of the forestry sector (Task Force 1991).

In contrast, the current policy enacted in 1994 represents an initial move in the right direction. It does so by considering commitments to some of the issues which are considered vital for a people-oriented forest policy, such as sustainable development, poverty alleviation, local people’s participation in forest protection and government support for the involvement of a broader sector of society in forestry development (Khan 2001). Examination of the current national forest policy reveals the following major features : i) a commitment to sustainable development (“meeting the basic needs of the present and future generations”) ; ii) the integration of forestry into a broader framework of rural development and poverty alleviation (“by creating employment opportunities, strengthening the rural and national economy and encouraging labor intensive forest-based cottage industries, the scope for poverty alleviation and forest based rural development sectors will be extended”) ; iii) the participation of local people in forest protection, especially in curbing “illegal occupation of forest lands, illegal tree felling and hunting of wild animals”, replaces an outdated reliance upon state force ; iv) a recognition of the importance of women’s participation in land-based production systems, particularly in homestead and farm forestry and participatory afforestation programmes ; and v) governmental support and encouragement for all forms of public and private afforestation programs, especially on rural homesteads and institutional premises.

7 Conclusion

The establishment of a forest policy in Bangladesh dates back to the colonial period of rule, with the first forest policy in Bangladesh being enacted by the British in 1894. The policy was modified in 1955, 1962, 1979, and later in 1994. Throughout the colonial era (up to 1947), forest policy has been oriented towards the commercial considerations of revenue generation and maximum resource exploitation. Forest policy established under Pakistani rule (in 1955 and 1962) showed a high degree of continuity with its colonial heritage and maintained an emphasis on commercial and industrial interests. This process of commercialization continued after the independence of Bangladesh in 1971 as the first national

forest policy of Bangladesh enacted in 1979 failed to address the issue of broader participation in forest management. The negative social impacts of this excessive, government-sponsored commercialization of forest interests include the systematic alienation of local communities from forests and forestry, a disregard for local livelihood needs and the progressive diminution of traditional rights. However, the current forest policy is a significant move towards people-oriented forestry and shows the government’s determination to protect and develop forest resources through people’s participation.

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