

During the last 50 years(1950- 2000), the region has recorded population growth of 3.4% per annum which is almost equal to the region's agriculture area growth rate of 4.4%. However, this growth in agriculture area is limited to the increase in the number of farms and there has been no improvements in actual crop income per farm or household. During the last decade (1990-2000), population growth has outstripped the agriculture area growth leading to acute marginalized and pauperized livelihoods. Stagnant agriculture growth indicates constraints in the availability of land (ADB,2001).

More than 70% of all households, about twice the national average, earn less than minimum food requirements set for the country as the national poverty line is situated at around Tk 35,000 per family in 1999. Annual household incomes are below Tk 24,000 for majority of local population, i. e. about Tk 4500 per capita, (or less than US\$ 100) in view of an average family size of 5.5 members. Most of the families of indigenous groups are still dependent on jhum and suffer from food shortages(Table-6). Major share of income in CHT comes from the export of forestry products and horticultural crops (Table-8) to other districts of the country. Most of the CHT income is incurred outside the region (ADB, 2001), so, the people of CHT are poor and marginalized despite abundant natural resources and higher per capita income of Tk.45,000 which is almost three times than the national average of Tk.13,300.

1. 2. CHT Forests and the Land Use Types

Land in the CHT is classified as government land officially designated for forestry. The indigenous communities can take private lease from the government land department. But, many of them are not aware of and interested in taking private leases due to cumbersome and corrupt land administration system introduced in CHT. There are three categories of forest land, including reserved forest, protected forest, and Unclassed State Forest(USF). The latter category is where most of the shifting cultivation takes place. As shifting cultivation is practiced under various common property regime, and the practice is discouraged altogether, although allowed in the USF. From their side, the indigenous communities claim this land as community land, whereas the reserved and protected forests are vested under the control of the Forest Department, the community managed(USF) land(Table-7, Map-2, Fig.3), which included shifting cultivation areas as well as its fallows and

village common forests, comes under the control of District Administration. The dominant forest types of the CHT are mixed evergreen and deciduous with relics of the following five major forest ecological sub-types;

- Tropical wet evergreen forests that cover the valleys,
- Tropical semi-evergreen forests covering the lower storey and deciduous forests covering the upper storey.
- Tropical moist deciduous forests occurring in valleys and channel banks,
- Tropical open deciduous species occurring on the exposed southern slopes.
- Bamboo forests either in pure patches or as undergrowth. Different bamboo species occupy the ecologically different land types extending from the channel banks to the hilltops. Much of the USF lands are now covered by various types of fallow vegetation including bamboo thickets, bushes and low forest of non-commercial shrubs and some are covered with monoculture forest plantations.

Outside the Reserve Forests, the following are the broad land use types in CHT:

- Rain fed shifting cultivation systems.
- Livestock-based farming systems/ Rain-fed or irrigation based lowland rice production/ Foothill terraced rice(*Ghona* cultivation) production systems.
- Commercial tree crop / horticultural crop production system.
- Homegardens/Homestead agroforestry production system.
- Miscellaneous annual cropping on miscellaneous lands e.g. *char* land, river terraces and fringe lands.

1. 3. CHT Soils

Hill soil is one of the vital components of CHT ecosystem that supplies major share of national needs of timber, horticultural crops, and spices, including the livelihood necessities for its population beyond its estimated carrying capacity. The increased national demand for timber, spices and fruits and the regional need for food and cash for the rapidly growing population of the region placed an increasing load on its land resources.