

From the Editors

This publication is an initial outcome of the recent efforts of the Bangladesh Conservation Approaches and Technologies (BANCAT)-a decentralized professional association of Soil and Water Conservation (SWC) specialists and Natural Resource Managers (NRMs) who have proven experience and track record of working in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region of Bangladesh.

BANCAT organized two training workshops in 2004 and 2005 respectively for the relevant experts and practitioners, wherein the participants evaluated and documented selected Conservation Approaches and Technologies (CATs) from the region. The Working Group of BANCAT facilitated the coming together of the leading SWC professionals to share key observations and experiences arising out of their many years of involvement in research and documentation of CATs in the CHT.

As a follow up to the above workshops and expert consultations, BANCAT eventually has decided to publish these documented CATs in an easily accessible (book) format with a view to making the information available to a wider readership.

As most of us are aware, land degradation is a major global environmental problem, and one of its primary causes is soil depletion associated with unsustainable ways of farming. Chemical and physical deterioration of land has put serious negative effects on agricultural productivity, water quality, biodiversity, climate change and socio-economic condition of the farming communities. In this backdrop, the discourse of Sustainable Land Management (SLM) focuses on use of land resources-- including soils, water, forest and its biodiversity-- for the production of goods to meet changing human needs, while simultaneously ensuring the long-term productive potential of these resources and the maintenance of their environmental functions. SLM combines technologies, policies and activities aimed at integrating socioeconomic principles with environmental concerns. Recently, there has been a growing pressure on our limited hilly land resources by the burgeoning population accompanied by land ownership conflicts and a non-conducive national policy regime. Despite this unfavourable context, the CHT farmers have managed to sustain their efforts towards improving their farming and livelihood conditions by adopting appropriate (traditional and new) farming approaches and technologies.

It has now been unequivocally established that research on NRM in general and SWC approaches in particular is strikingly limited especially in the context of the CHT. This publication is expected to contribute, in its own modest ways, towards bridging this gap in knowledge by focusing on the CHT farmers' coping mechanisms to improve their livelihood with the adoption of improved farming and NRM technologies, and also on their indigenous and/or adapted practices that are contributing to improvement of CHT environment and its natural resource base. We hope that this literature will be of considerable help to our SWC and NRM specialists in stimulating new ideas and thinking in their pursuit of finding ways and means of better and sustainable land management in CHT-- thereby paving the way for exploring improved livelihood opportunities for the local communities. We would like to admit that there might be anomalies in some statistical figures quoted from various literature, which also testify to the fact that there is a serious dearth of reliable and accurate data on CHT.

We would like to take this opportunity to record our deep appreciation for Dr. M. Nurul Alam (Executive Chairman, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, Dhaka) for writing the 'Foreword' to this volume; and also for Mr. Michael Heyn (Director, UNDP's Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Facility, Dhaka, Bangladesh), Dr. Hanspeter Liniger (WOCAT Coordinator, Centre for Development and Environment, University of Bern, Switzerland), Drs. Godert vanLynden (Sustainable Land Management Specialist, ISRIC, Netherlands) and Mr. Roger White (Regional Coordinator, ICIMOD, Kathmandu, Nepal), for their kind 'Messages' which have graced this publication. We also gratefully acknowledge the financial support of SDC/INTERCOOPERATION and the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences (Chittagong University, Bangladesh) without which, needless to say, this book would not have been possible. Our long time friend and comrade, Mr. Farid Uddin Ahmed (Member Director-NRM, Bangladesh Agricultural Research Council, Dhaka) has extended a most generous hand in this respect. Our sincere thanks and gratitude are also due to Dr. Sanjeev Bhuchar, Dr. Isabelle Providoli and Ms. Elisabeth Kerkhoff (of ICIMOD, Kathmandu, Nepal) for kindly sparing considerable time and efforts for us amidst their busy schedules by reviewing the manuscript and making elaborate suggestions for improvements.

Sudibya K. Khisa

Jalal U. Shoaib

Niaz A. Khan