

Report No. 50

Forestry, Forest Biodiversity & Governance:
Looking for a Pro-People Policy

Centre for Policy Dialogue

House 40c, Road 11, Dhanmondi R/A, GPO Box 2129, Dhaka 1209, Bangladesh

Tel: 8124770; Fax: 8130951; E-mail: cpd@bdonline.com

Website: www.cpd-bangladesh.org

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The Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD), established in 1993, is an innovative initiative to promote an ongoing process of dialogue between the principal partners in the decision-making and implementing process. The dialogues are designed to address important policy issues and to seek constructive solutions to these problems. The Centre has already organised a series of such major dialogues at local, regional and national levels. These dialogues have brought together ministers, opposition frontbenchers, MPs, business leaders, NGOs, donors, professionals and other functional groups in civil society within a non-confrontational environment to promote focused discussions. The expectation of the CPD is to create a national policy consciousness where members of civil society will be made aware of critical policy issues affecting their lives and will come together in support of particular policy agendas which they feel are conducive to the well being of the country. The CPD has also organised a number of South Asian bilateral and regional dialogues as well as some international dialogues.

In support of the dialogue process the Centre is engaged in research programmes which are both serviced by and are intended to serve as inputs for particular dialogues organised by the Centre throughout the year. Some of the major research programmes of CPD include The Independent Review of Bangladesh's Development (IRBD), Governance and Development, Population and Sustainable Development, Trade Policy Analysis and Multilateral Trading System, Corporate Responsibility, Governance, Regional Cooperation for Infrastructure Development and Leadership Programme for the Youth. The CPD also carries out periodic public perception surveys on policy issues and developmental concerns.

*As part of CPD's publication activities, a CPD Dialogue Report series is brought out in order to widely disseminate the summary of the discussions organised by the Centre. The present report contains the highlights of a dialogue organised by CPD in collaboration with United States Agency for International Development (USAID) held at CIRDAP Auditorium, Dhaka on July 31, 2001 on the theme of **Forestry, Forest Biodiversity & Governance: Looking for a Pro-People Policy.***

Report prepared by: Iftikhar A Chowdhury, Senior Reporter, The Financial Express.

Assistant Editor: Anisatul Fatema Yousuf, Head (Dialogue & Communication), CPD.

Series Editor: Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman, CPD.

Dialogue on

Forestry, Forest Biodiversity & Governance: Looking for a Pro-People Policy

The Dialogue

Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) jointly organised a dialogue on the theme “Forestry, Forest Biodiversity & Governance: Looking for a Pro-People Policy” on July 31, 2002 at CIRDAP Auditorium, Dhaka. The dialogue marked the presence of a good number of participants from varied professional groups including the academia, NGOs, donor agencies, politics, bureaucracy and members of the civil society. Professor Rehman Sobhan, Chairman, CPD presided over the dialogue, while Mr. Shajahan Siraj, MP, the Minister for Environment and Forests and Mr. H.N. Ashequr Rahman, Former State Minister for Environment and Forests were present as Chief Guest and Special Guest respectively.

Dr. Ainun Nishat, Country Director, IUCN Bangladesh and Mr. Junaid K Choudhury, Team Leader, Sundarbans Biodiversity Conservation Project, IUCN, Bangladesh jointly prepared the keynote paper titled “Forestry, Forest Biodiversity and Governance.” However, at the dialogue the keynote paper was presented by Dr Nishat.

Three background papers were also prepared on the theme. Those included ‘Rethinking Environmental Governance: Forest Biodiversity Management in Bangladesh’ by Dr. Azharul H Mazumder, Team Leader USAID, Bangladesh; ‘Existing Forest Resources Status and Management in Bangladesh jointly prepared by Mr. Mamunul H Khan and Dr. Azharul H Mazumder and ‘Conservation of Tropical Forest Biodiversity in Bangladesh: Issues, Opportunities and Policy Implications’ jointly prepared by Mr. Thomas Catterson and Mr. Anwarul Islam, forestry and natural resources management consultant.

The Keynote in a Nutshell

In his opening remark Dr Ainun Nishat, being mindful of the fact that the policy regime is already in place for a pro-people approach to forestry, forest biodiversity and governance, identified the problems arising from the legal and institutional regimes, which impede formulation of people oriented strategies. He further clarified that the focus of the keynote paper was not on the Forest Department but on the management of the forest resources. On the same note, he drew distinctions between

government and governance which emphasised on effective participation in the decision making process by all the stakeholders.

Nishat observed that contrary to the normal belief that tropical forests are rich in biodiversity, the forests of Bangladesh are today less so, compared to the past. For example in the Sal forests of Bangladesh, a particular species (locally called 'Sarpagandha' has largely disappeared. This indicates that both forest health and biodiversity of resources has been deteriorating over the years.

Nishat maintained that the Forestry Department should now focus on the development of community based resource management mechanisms, restoration of selected habitat and ecosystems, implementation of existing rather than formulation of new policies, increasing public awareness on key issues and finally improving institutional capacities.

The Present State of Forest Resources

The keynote speaker reported that the total amount of our forest land is about 2.52 mil hectares or 17.4 per cent of the total land area. Of this area, 1.52 mil hectares are managed by the Forest Department, 0.73 mil hectares are under the control of the District Administration mainly located in Chittagong Hill Tracts and an additional 0.27 mil hectares are owned by private parties. Apparently, the area of protected wilderness devoted to biodiversity conservation as a percentage of the total forest area is also favourable in comparison to world standard, it was 7 per cent in Bangladesh while the global average was 10 per cent. The forest types that exist in Bangladesh are Tropical Wet-evergreen Forests, Tropical Semi-evergreen Forests (Chittagong, Chittagong Hill Tracts and Sylhet), Moist Deciduous Forests (Dhaka, Tangail and Mymensingh), Mangrove (Sundarbans) and Freshwater Wetland Forests (Sylhet and Mymensingh). The main concern remains, however, as to how far these forest areas are still stocked with trees here scope for skepticism prevails. The forestry sector today contributes about 4% of Bangladesh's GDP.

Managing and Organising the Resources

The Forest Department and Environment Department are directly responsible under the Ministry of Environment and Forests to manage biodiversity and ecosystems, both of which the keynote speaker explained, shoulder certain responsibilities. While Ministry of Forest takes the lead role, Ministry of Land, Ministry of Fisheries, Ministry of Communications and Ministry of Water Resources are all involved in

afforestation efforts under their respective jurisdictions. The primary role of the Forest Department is to produce forest products and services, and at the same time, generate revenues. It is the responsibility of the department to regularise the irregular forests with better species, provide sustained supply of forest products, meet the demands of forest products including non-timber forest products such as honey, *golpatta*, fuel etc. In addition, the Forest Department is also responsible for the management of wildlife and aquatic resources which lie within the domain of forest.

Problems of Management

The Forest Department addresses the management of forest resources by formulating a Management Plan or Working Plan covering a period of 10 years for a particular Forest Division with a specific area of jurisdiction. Nishat questioned this very basic tenet of forest resource management and suggested that it is probably time to initiate ecosystem-based management or forest-type-based management rather than the traditional territory-based management system. Another problem with this traditional management, he pointed out, is that there is a considerable amount of time gap between the end of an ongoing plan and the start of a new plan, which is not at all desirable.

Nishat also focused on another incompatibility between the two streams of management activities of the Forest Department, namely the traditional Management Plan versus the donor-funded Development Project oriented operation. He informed the forum that the traditional Management Plan/Working Plan neither emphasises Acacia or Eucalyptus plantation, nor does it fix a shorter rotation period (ranging from 6 to 18 years). They also do not subscribe to the concept of buffer zones (a strategy that aims to keep people away from the forests). In other words, the speaker was of the view that the Management Plan approved by the forest authorities is more people-oriented than the donor driven project. Notwithstanding this, the management of forest resources suffers from a number of weaknesses. A moratorium on tree felling continues and at the same time occasional withdrawal of the moratorium creates chaos in the market, which needs to be addressed immediately. Other problems include lack of adequate manpower and funding, poor infrastructure facilities, widespread pilferage and corruption. Nishat also cited want of effective integration among local people, NGOs and poverty alleviation strategists as one of the most pertinent problems in forest management. Besides, inadequate attention given to sustainable development and biodiversity conservation, poor inspection quality due to

lack of incentives, immense workload of the forestry personnel and unfulfilled international treaty obligations also stood in the way of effective management.

The keynote speaker then turned to the overriding issue of the alarming rate of forest depletion, which is about five times higher than the average rate for South East Asia (3.3 per cent vs. 0.6 per cent). While the speaker acknowledged the fact that increasing population pressure plays an important role in this process of rapid depletion, he, nevertheless, emphasised on effective legal backup, rooting out corruption, bringing about accountability and improving the overall law and order situation.

Legal Environment

The 1973 Wildlife Preservation Act serves as a legal basis for the establishment of the 15 Protected forests/areas (PAs) managed by the Forest Department. Environment Department also in 1995 declared eight areas as Ecologically Critical Areas (ECAs). While the Environment Department and the Forest Department both came forward to initiate biodiversity conservation, Nishat believed that considerable overlapping exists in terms of spatial and operational aspects of biodiversity conservation in these demarcated areas. Nishat therefore, strongly recommended the review of the terms of references of these two. Management plans for the Protected Areas are complete, but awaits implementation. Meanwhile plans for the Ecologically Critical Areas are still to be prepared, informed Dr. Nishat.

The first instrument guiding the policy issues, the Charter of Indian Forests was promulgated as early as 1855 recognising the importance of reserve forests, explained Dr. Nishat. However, the 1894 Forest Policy shifted its focus to revenue earning and framing of rules to that end, based on which, 1927 Forest Act came into being. The 1955 Forest Policy again focused on yield and this emphasis was influential in later stages also, such as, the 1970 policy. Dr. Nishat by and large favoured the Forest Policy of 1994 and accepted it as a more or less pro-people policy needing only operationalising of its provisions. Other national policies that somewhat relates to natural resource management are Environment Policy, Agricultural Extension Policy, Landuse Policy, Water Policy (recently promulgated), Industrial Policy and so on. The keynote speaker although identified some minor flaws in such polices, which need to be reviewed, he at the same time, agreed that these major policies are in congruence with the objectives of natural resource management.

Issues of Concern

On the whole, the speaker concluded, the focus of management is not on biodiversity because policies are still influenced by the past trend of yield and revenue generation. Forest management at present is territory-based, not ecosystem-based. Institutional framework should be updated and decentralisation of decision-making involving the local people is necessary. Dr. Nishat also focused on other areas of concerns like increasing manpower, improving monitoring and evaluation mechanisms etc. He also said legal framework is still based on 1927 Act that needs to be reviewed. In this context, Dr. Nishat informed that the Forest Act of 2000 (amended) incorporated Social Forestry related principles but rules are yet to be framed. The keynote speaker emphasised on increasing public awareness and advocacy. But he particularly raised concerns regarding ecotourism. This needs to be conducted without endangering the ecosystem, he said taking a cautionary approach. Some achievements have been made in integration of local community in benefit-sharing of social forestry activities. But lot more needs to be done. Research and training is another area, which needs to be addressed more seriously, he noted. This is a matter to be seen whether the management regime of the extraction of non-timber forest products is sustainable, felt the speaker. Scientific approach to the PA and ECA management is still largely missing, added Dr. Nishat.

Deciding Future Fate of Forests

In addressing the future course of action Dr. Nishat laid paramount emphasis on increasing awareness of the people, need for decentralisation of decision making process and increasing institutional capacities of the agencies involved, specially the Forest Department. Dr. Nishat categorically pointed out the need to create six different entities to look after different aspects of biodiversity conservation. Those include: Production Aspects (currently looked after by Forest Department), Wildlife Management, Social Forestry, Research and Education, Environmental Evaluation and Monitoring, and Pollution Control (currently being taken care of by the Environment Department).

Dr. Nishat reiterated the need for scientific management of protected areas including the watersheds and added that all ecotypes should come under protected area management. Research needs to be prioritised and harvesting of forest products including the non-timber products needs further studies. Restoration of habitats and proper implementation of ecotourism may also be undertaken. Dr. Nishat put special

emphasis on participatory approach in monitoring with local communities, NGOs and civil society working as a team. The keynote speaker reiterated that the focus of the dialogue is not on the Forest Department, it is rather on the management of resources and governance. The inadequacy suffered by the Forest Department in the past is due to the inherent design and weaknesses of the organisation, he concluded.

Floor Discussion

Forest Department: A Friend or a Foe?

Dr Sadeka Halim, Associate Professor, Sociology Department, Dhaka University India and Nepal, where management has been handed over to local people and the role of the FD has been reduced to facilitator and provider of technical assistance. She added that the gender dimension is not adequately addressed in the Management Plan prepared by the FD. addressed the issue of the role of Forest Department (FD) in Social Forestry. She disagreed with the keynote presenter and maintained that the discussion on such a theme must include the role of the FD, which is a major player in forest resource management. If the role and responsibility of the FD is not analysed, she questioned how the governance issue could be addressed. She referred to the success stories in rather, she felt that the disadvantaged, poor, landless and women are boxed together in the plan, under the assumption that they all share similar problems, whereas women in local communities are the worst sufferers of such discrimination. Mr. Philip Gain, Director, SEHD on the same note criticised the role of the FD. He found that community participation is extremely limited in the FD-sponsored projects. Dr Sajjadur Rasheed, Professor, Geography and Environment Department, Dhaka University also diagnosed corruption in the FD as one of the most important reasons for depletion of forest resources. However, Mr. Bill Collis, Senior Natural Resources Advisor, Mach Project, Winrock, Bangladesh lauded the role of the FD and citing examples from Nepal, the USA, Thailand and the Philippines, he sympathised with the FD saying that such institutions always face adverse criticisms everywhere and Bangladesh is no exception. Mr. Raja Debashis Roy, Chakma Chief & Hill Tracts NGO Forum, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court, Dhaka suggested that the FD should be more and more involved in sorting out land tenure problems, capital building and providing technical assistance specially in tree farming activities in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT).

Mr. Anwar Faruque, Chief Conservator of Forests attributed the reasons for forest depletion to the overall gloom in the socioeconomic conditions prevailing in the

country. In the wake of overwhelming population pressure and widespread poverty, he argued that unguarded resources such as forests are most vulnerable to plundering. So it may not be appropriate to blame the FD exclusively for this. He suggested that more realistic view is necessary and emphasised on comprehensive actions to improve the situation. He agreed with Nishat that the 1994 Policy has relatively more room for integration of the local community but its implementation has not been effective as yet. The FD faces, among other things, a severe crisis of trained manpower, he added. Mr. Sabihuddin Ahmed, Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests also supported Mr. Anwar Faruque's view that blaming the FD will not solve the problem.

Referring to Mr. Dijen Sharma and Mr. Nawajesh Ali Khan, two eminent environmentalists, Mr. AMA Muhith, Former Finance Minister and President, Paribesh Rokkha Sapath suggested that the protected areas (sanctuaries, national parks, game reserves, etc) should be managed by a separate body, where the FD would only be a participant in the management process.

Pushing for a Pro-People Policy Agenda:

The participants engaged in a lengthy discussion whether the current policies/Acts are adequate and appropriate to address the issues of biodiversity conservation vis-à-vis forest management, and for ensuring people's effective participation. The participants seemed to be divided on this issue where one group supported the notion that the required policy regime is already in place and all it needs is effective implementation (which includes the keynote presenter), while the other group contested this view.

Sabihuddin Ahmed, drawing attention to the pro-people policy theme as stated in the dialogue, complained that nobody including the keynote presenter himself has defined what constitutes a pro-people policy. If the government is to take corrective action, clarity on this issue is needed, he surmised.

Taking the lead from the keynote presentation, Sadeka Halim observed that the keynote paper never mentioned the 1979 Forest policy. She also questioned the argument of Nishat that only operationalising the policies will be sufficient, since operationalising incorrect policies will not solve the problem. Philip Gain pointed out that most policies, including the much-acclaimed 1994 policy, were donor-influenced and imposed policies, therefore, these are hardly likely to be 'pro-people' policies. An appropriate Policy regime should be able to protect and preserve our natural resources, which constantly remain under threat.

Raja Debashis Roy found that some encouragement is given to local people to manage social forestry projects under the Forest Act (amended) 2000. He however, expressed his disappointment over the fact that the same ‘policing’ attitude is enshrined in the Forest Act (amended) 2000, as it was in the 1927 Forest Act. This, according to him, is in contradiction with the 1994 policy. There are some positive features in the 1994 policy but there is room for improvement. Raja further questioned the rationality of the ‘transit pass’ system, which is acting as the biggest disincentive or obstacle to tree farming by individuals. Here Mr. Iqbal Fattah, Senior Programme Coordinator, PROSHIKA pointed to the hassles one has to go through in felling ones own tree, the law needs to be reviewed.

Mr. Niaz Ahmed Khan, Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Chittagong University, however, was of the opinion that 1994 policy is a reasonable one and has sufficient provisions to serve as a pro-people policy. He quoted from the policy and mentioned that it enshrines elements of sustainability that are catering to the needs of today and tomorrow. He also highlighted the provisions in the 1994 policy where it emphasised the creation of employment opportunities, poverty alleviation and augmenting national income through forestry. This is also a welcome departure because, contrary to the traditional belief that poverty compels people to plunder forests, effective use of forest resources is intended to make a dent on poverty. The policy, however, does not mention the mode of institutional reforms to improve the efficiency of the sector. Thus, he concluded that while the policies regime is in place, the laws need to be reviewed and amended, if policies are to be effectively implemented.

Anwar Faruque agreed with Nishat that the 1994 policy is reasonable. He explained that forest policies have been evolving over the years and gradually adjusting to the changing circumstances and needs of the time. In the past, the focus was more on revenue generation. But later, the focus has gradually shifted to participatory forestry.

The Issue of Community Participation

Sadeka Halim found the level of community participation in the social forestry projects inadequate. Local people should have been involved in the decision making process, especially regarding the choice of species, location of plantations, marketing of forest harvests, profit-sharing and so on in a more effective manner. The traditional view that people are encroachers in the forest areas is also not conducive to effectively implementing social forestry projects, she commented. She elaborated on

situations in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region where people have settled for long and some social institutions have already developed such schools, Union Parishad, tribal headmen, *karbaril* etc. Therefore, Sadeka argued that such people could hardly be termed as ‘encroachers’.

Raja Debashis Roy remained skeptical about the assessment of Nishat that the benefit-sharing mechanism is functioning effectively. He felt that the local people have little stake in marketing forest products. Without creating and ensuring their stake, he reckoned that benefit-sharing cannot be effective. He agreed with Sadeka that community participation is very limited in social forestry projects.

Identifying population pressure as one of the major causes of forest depletion, Sajjadur Rasheed surmised that encroachment will occur and forestlands will continue to be converted into farmlands. Echoing the popular concern, he suggested that, if people encroach on the reserve forests, then they can’t be deterred from farming, simply because they would need food to survive. Social forestry may be best applied in public lands such as rail-track-margins, embankments or roads. He however, questioned the notion that absence of people’s participation enhances depletion.

Dr. Khairul Alam, Divisional Officer, BFRI pointed out to the need for a participatory approach in formulating Forest Management Plans even in areas other than the protected ones. Citing examples from Cox’s Bazaar, where local people cut trees for stacking the betel leaf plants when the trees reach the sapling stage, he indicated that the concerns of the local people are not being adequately addressed. Similarly, he emphasised on the importance of recognising the stake of the FD personnel such as *malis* and forest guards in executing any policy. Demands of beneficiaries and consumers at the local level are also areas that need proactive intervention, he added.

Mr. Bill Collis joining the discussion on the topic, claimed that the scientific aspects of biodiversity conservation are probably better understood than its counterpart, which is the pro-people dimension of policy. He informed the dialogue that Bangladesh is a world leader in wetland management. And drawing from that experience, he suggested that to involve local people meaningfully, all stakeholders, not only the poor but also the local elite, would have to be integrated to ensure sustainability.

Anwar Faruque explained that integration of local people in social forestry is an evolving process and the FD is also learning new things, because the context varies

greatly from one place to another. He was reacting to the examples of successful involvement of local people in social forestry projects in the Philippine, Indonesia and India. Exotic experiences, he pointed out, will not serve as a basis for replication in Bangladesh but needs to be tailored to suit our needs. Past experiences suggest that the law offered little remedy as 10 to 15 per cent of the forest area has already been encroached.

A danger, however, was identified by Sabihuddin Ahmed regarding people's participation in social forestry projects. Easy access to people has sometimes invited bad experiences. As the Sundarbans is inaccessible, probably for that reason, some resources have still been preserved. He categorically mentioned that in the Chunati Game Reserve, participation has spelt disaster for the forests as 60 per cent of the forest has been depleted. On the other hand, there were encroachments in Bhaluka. But subsequently, through a participatory approach, the depleted areas were brought under tree plantation. In Mymensingh, there was no encroachment. But people were 'imported' under participatory forestry and more than 60 per cent of the forest cover has been destroyed there by now, Mr. Ahmed added.

Competing Objectives of Plantation and Biodiversity Conservation

Philip Gain initiated discussion on this issue, which raised considerable debate among the participants. Gain pointed out that plantations are not forests. According to him, under donor-funded projects it is basically crops, which are managed to the harvest stage after the rotation period. He went on to observe that after the promulgation of the 1994 policy, the Forestry Master Plan followed. This Master Plan was then connected with the Tropical Forestry Action Plan. The Asian Development Bank (ADB) pursued these plans all through the process and offered assistance of about US 100 million dollars on condition that the existing forest Acts would be amended, a task the ADB undertook in the Philippines and India, but failed. He pointed to the donor funded industrial plantation project of the FD in CHT for pulpwood production to save Karnaphuli Paper Mill. He recalled the devastating effect of the Kaptai Dam on the CHT. He was quite critical about the choice of species in the plantations such as Acacia, Eucalyptus, and Tobacco (undertaken by British American Tobacco) by clearing natural forests. These are violations of biodiversity conservation norms. Gain emphasised on the need to develop a mechanism to formulate a bottom line and an ethical standard when negotiating with the supranational organisations such as the ADB and the World Bank. He concluded that the Forest Act (amended), 2000,

although highlighting social forestry, has yet to demonstrate its benefits in the light of the past 10 year's experience.

Mr. Mesbahus Salehin, Professor, Department of Geography & Environment, Jahangirnagar University however, sounded positive as he argued that tree plantation is important even if it is located in plantations. Here Raja Debashis Roy noticed that the scope of involvement of local people in projects is by default limited. He stressed the need to address the participation issue in totality.

Anwar Faruque responding to the issue raised by Gain started by stating that plantation vs traditional forest conservation is a technical matter. The priority at the moment is to bring back encroached land under the FD's control. Therefore, encroachment will have to be dealt with through a participatory approach. He further predicted that social forestry or participatory forestry would become the ultimate system of forestry in Bangladesh.

Sabihuddin Ahmed dismissed Philip Gain and Raja Debashis Roy's claim of the 1994 Forest Policy being donor-driven. He argued that as long as it brings benefits for us, then there is nothing wrong with it being a donor-driven policy. He, in fact, argued from the premise that it is our fault that donors can come in and dictate terms to us. If rotation is longer, as opposed to shorter in the plantations, then people's interest cannot be sustained for a longer period. That is the reason behind adopting a shorter rotation plantation strategy. There are various rotations ranging from 5-15 years. Adoption of shorter rotation plantations is actually derived from previous experiences. The main issue is to increase the green cover. He concluded that shorter rotation plantations can very well be a good option especially in the marginal lands along the roadside, railways and riverbanks.

Issues of Terminology

Interestingly, a number of participants raised some basic definitional issues. Raja Debashis explained; '*banayan*' refers to *afforestation* where there is no forest. But social forestry is practiced even where there are forests. Moreover, '*shamajik banayan*' or social forestry fails to address the protection aspect of forests. A M A Muhith observed that the term should have been Social Forestry Management. Then, the social forestry programmes would become more pervasive in nature. Iqbal Fattah mentioned that it appears from the recently amended Forest Act of 2000 that only government initiatives of social forestry will be considered as genuine social forestry

programmes. How then would the initiatives of the private organisations and NGOs be termed.

Questions of Governance

Bill Collis while speaking on governance emphasised on the Union Parishad (UP) at the local level because this body is composed of elected representatives of the people. All other agencies such as NGOs, donors, the FD, the district and upazila administrators, are not elected. So, the UP can play a pivotal role in the governance of forest resources. Mr. Badiul Alam Majumder, Country Director, The Hunger Project stated that the government is responsible for governance. Since governance is missing, resources are being depleted. He found lack of political commitment in conservation of biodiversity, because, according to him, it is not in the interests of the political leaders to conserve biodiversity. He suggested that effective community participation is necessary for bringing about governance. Lack of transparency and accountability, explained Majumder, is to be blamed for the precarious situation in the forest areas. He suggested that the civil society should take the initiative for waging a social movement to make people more aware of the problems in the forestry sector. Mr. Giasuddin, Director General, Water Resources Planning Organization also recognised the importance of public awareness and morality to bring about good governance.

Shadowy Statistics

Gain was disinclined to accept the statistics regarding the forest area. He pointed out Nishat in his paper presented estimates which show the forest area to cover 17 per cent of our total land area, how far this area is stocked with trees is a matter of speculation. Anwar Faruque explained that the 17 per cent forest cover is a mere estimate. He further added that out of this, some 9 per cent are stocked with trees. Sajjadur Rasheed agreed with Faruque on this point. Badiul Alam cited the example of India where 2 per cent of forest area is kept aside for conservation and 15 per cent is devoted to wildlife. Mr Amanutallah Khan, Chairman, Department of Geography & Environment, University of Dhaka raised altogether a different issue and mentioned that the popular notion of forest area as a percentage of total land is based on the political boundary of a country, which is irrational. Rather than taking of a political boundary as the yardstick, the actual focus should be on natural resources.

Harnessing Homestead Forests

A number of participants have emphasised on the importance of management of homestead forests. Homestead forests supply the majority of timber and firewood. Muhith in his intervention focused on this issue, as did Raja Debashis Roy. Providing effective incentives and removing disincentives in the homestead forestry sector is urgently needed. Amanutallah Khan suggested that the afforestation effort should go beyond protected forest areas and on to the homesteads. The domain of local government and local level leaders should be the key players in patronising and bolstering the entire process of homestead forestry.

Biodiversity Conservation Beyond Protected Areas

Khairul Alam drew the attention of the participants to the aspect of biodiversity beyond the realm of Protected Areas (PAs). Because biodiversity transcends both time and space, Alam explained, it is a dynamic process, influenced by human intervention which sometimes can enrich biodiversity. Therefore, Alam argued, it is necessary to also address biodiversity outside the protected areas. Sajjadur Rasheed commented that biodiversity conservation should put due emphasis on the fringe population in the vicinity of the forest areas as well as the people living inside it.

Alternative Fuel Supply

Considering the existing precarious condition of forests, shrinking water bodies, population pressures and so on, Muhith apprehended that forest depletion would continue. He suggested providing LP gas to every household as an alternative to firewood. He argued that local people are extracting wood as a source of fuel for their daily energy use as the natural gas reserves only cater to the needs of 15 to 20 percent of the people. Therefore, to address the competing objectives of alternative sources of energy and conservation of forest resources, a social movement needs to be launched on a priority basis. Giasuddin shared this view although he suggested the need to explore the possibility of supplying electricity to the rural areas as well, as an alternative source of energy.

Supplementary Issues

Along the course of the dialogue a number of important issues gained currency although elaborate discussions did not cover these issues. These issues branched out as offshoots of the core issues.

Mesbahus Salehin pointed out the need for multiple use of forest resource as timber, pulpwood, recreation, etc. He cited examples from Kenya where they are practicing Cooperative Forestry in fallow land.

Sajjadur Rasheed observed that rather than the term management, governance is now the preferred area of intervention in managing resources. The two terms are not synonymous. Governance includes management but goes beyond the realm of management. He congratulated Nishat for 'charting the course' and welcomed the departure from the ultra- environmentalists and traditional forestry practitioners' views. He preferred the forward-looking approach of the paper. There should be a symbiosis between development and environment, he concluded.

Raja Debashis Roy during his intervention suggested adhering to the principles of the Convention on Biodiversity. He strongly pleaded for incorporating indigenous knowledge in biodiversity conservation. He emphasised on natural regeneration of forests by non-intervention. Philip Gain cautioned about planting alien species, while Muhith stressed on the need for establishing a national commission for alien species of trees.

Khairul Alam suggested that even when Management Plans are prepared for areas other than the protected ones, the principles of the Convention on Biodiversity conservation should be followed. He further clarified that although Nishat in his presentation used the term 'ecotype', he probably meant 'habitat type', because the former refers to a particular species of population in a very small area, which was not the case here.

Shah Alam, Author & Director, RDB recalling the long tradition of planting trees along the Grand Trunk road during the Mughal period, emphasised the need to build a GO-NGO partnership to sustain a vigorous initiative for tree plantation.

Sabihuddin pointed to the insufficiency of time provided by such seminars for the in depth discussion of issues needed to influence policy change. He suggested that the CPD should hold a three-day-long exhaustive workshop with the assistance of the government, if necessary, to do justice to the wide-ranging issues involved.

Amant Uallah Khan emphasised on the use of technology, especially remote sensing, in biodiversity conservation. Marghub Morshed, Chairman, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission reiterated the need for civil society to take the initiative in biodiversity conservation, citing success stories of civil society

movements in various fields. Finding strength from these successes, he stressed on sensitising the public at large. Pressurising the government by the civil society could achieve important breakthroughs.

Giasuddin Chowdhury emphasised on the linkage between the management of water and forests. He referred to the recently-prepared National Water Management Plan and informed the meeting that specific provisions are on offer to ensure the mutual benefit of forest and water resources. Mesbahus Salehin pointed to the need to consider the psychological/attitudinal difference between the people living inside the forest and those living outside it whilst planning any participatory forestry activities. He also stressed the importance of addressing the issue of slash and burn cultivation as well as biological control and corruption in forest management. Sabihuddin Ahmed pointed out that impeding natural courses might also create depletion, exemplified in the fast depletion of Sundari trees in the Sundarbans, where salinity increase has been linked to extinction of Sundari trees.

Response of the Keynote Speaker

While responding to the floor discussion Nishat expressed his disappointment at the discussion for not being sufficiently provocative.

He reiterated that two agencies, Department of Environment (DOE) and the FD are engaged in biodiversity conservation in protected areas, under separate legal regimes, such as, the DOE, under the 1995 act and FD under the 1973 Wildlife Act. Any potential contradiction between these two jurisdictions needs to be resolved.

In forests other than protected areas, the FD is guided by the 1894 policy and the 1927 act. The 1894 policy and 1955 policy laid emphasis on revenue collection. According to that mandate, the FD generates revenue. However, Nishat argued that this is also not a pro-people approach. Therefore, the FD needs to be restructured to make it more pro-people. A good start has been made with the 1994 policy and the social forestry activities under its provisions, which appear reasonable.

Nishat re-emphasised on the involvement of people at every level regarding environmental governance. He further mentioned that plans should be laid out as to what we are going to do in case of protected forestry, productive forestry, homestead forestry and social forestry.

He informed the floor that a management plan in the protected area management is laid out but not yet implemented. He agreed with Sabihuddin Ahmed that in certain

cases, we need to adopt a micro-level approach as with the Sundarbans. He categorically mentioned that in monitoring biodiversity conservation in protected areas, appropriate indicators need to be identified based on empirical data. He also stressed on a participatory monitoring regime.

Nishat agreed with the floor that capacity building is necessary for participatory forestry along with institutional strengthening, augmented manpower and adequate training. Responding to the floor, he offered a hypothesis that Sundari is dying due to salinity increase and unless proved otherwise, he maintained that he would prefer to stick to this view. He agreed with the suggestion that Ministry of Agriculture should have been identified as a stakeholder.

Finally, Nishat informed the forum that while preparing the keynote paper he had discussions with the authors of the background papers prepared for the study, but the views expressed in this paper are those of their own.

Presentation by the Special Guest, Mr H N Ashequr Rahman, Former State Minister for Environment and Forests

At the very outset, Mr. Rahman drew the attention to the theme, which he termed as normative and duly highlighted the importance of biodiversity. However, he mentioned that a pro-people policy might precede governance, which seemed a more logical sequencing.

Quoting Goutam Buddha, he underscored the significance of forests. “Forest is an extraordinary entity, source of immense kindness and benevolence, pleases to dispense herself for the sake of others, even the essentials for her own existence without looking for return. She also harbors the woodcutter who diminishes her.”

He felt that people are generally aware about forestry issues. While there are enough legal provisions and linkages with the international efforts on biodiversity conservation, the real challenge lies in striking a balance between the infinite demand for resources resulting from population pressure and availability of resources. Incidentally, he stated that NGOs probably provide people with comfort for the time being. But the capacity to transcend classes and crossing geographical boundaries is the real challenge for sustaining development, he added.

He emphasised on human resource development i.e. education and training to build capacity. Citing the example of attaining self-sufficiency in food, the Former State

Minister was of the view that this is the triumph of technology emanating from capacity-building.

He observed that involving the community into the mainstream of poverty reduction programmes is still limited to providing them with some amenities to live a less-than-modest life not beyond that, which, according to him, is a charity-oriented view. He emphasised on striking a balance between what we are to consume and what we are going to create or produce and what we presently have which is the challenge of the 21st century and a global responsibility. Rahman maintained that we have a very hardworking and brave population but we have failed to provide them with the required guidance. We have lacked the vision to sustain our resources base to provide for the future. A contingent and piecemeal approach is pursued everywhere to meet the immediate demand.

Focusing on the issue of ecotourism, he felt this particular area was blessed with enormous opportunities and added that the solitude of the Sundarbans and the Nijhum Dweep could become highly marketable ecotourism products. He also stressed on establishing nurseries in all upazilas by enhancing the institutional capabilities of the FD. He believed that it is possible to relocate or divert the yearly allocation of 75000 taka of the Agriculture Department for establishing nurseries. In this regard, he argued that with such small allocations, setting up of nurseries would be more viable than anything else.

On the issue of governance, he took the view that it should be based on trust. Mere emphasis on ‘numbers’ like increasing the police force would not bring about qualitative changes in governance, if there were lack of trust. When people would believe that wrongdoers would be punished, then a small number of police will be sufficient. It is equally applicable to biodiversity conservation. Good governance will automatically nullify the influence of the donors.

Address of the Chief Guest, Mr. Shajahan Siraj MP, Minister for Environment and Forests

The Minister began by highlighting the ecological linkage between forest and water resources and raised the issue of sharing water of all the international rivers including the Ganges. He called upon the civil society and all concerned to initiate awareness and to help formulate and implement a comprehensive plan to conserve our water resources. He, however, stressed the need to keep this issue out of petty political interests.

In his address as the Chief Guest, focused on a number of environmental issues such as resource conservation in haor areas, CHT, indiscriminate use of fertilisers and so on. In this context, he underscored the need for detailed planning. He also took the opportunity to clear the position of the Prime Minister as having a positive, uncompromising frame of mind, keen on development of not only forest resources, but all other resources as well. He also highlighted the achievement of the Finance Minister for his move towards a self-reliant economy. He observed that it would be highly unsatisfactory if we are not able to achieve self-reliance even after 31 years of independence. The minister further stressed on the need to integrate the masses in the decision making and implementation process of afforestation projects. In this connection, he referred to the recent campaign that put a ban on polythene use, which he claimed, achieved wide acceptance of the masses.

He emphasised on the need for strengthening the manpower and the logistic base for meaningful and effective integration of the local people into the development and biodiversity conservation process. He mentioned that given the rising interest of local people in social forestry, the participation process was according to the law and free from any kind of terrorism in case of forestry projects.

The Minister also laid importance on GO-NGO partnership in nursery establishment. Referring to the Prime Minister's advise on vigorous plantation of fruit and medicinal trees, he explained the benefits of such tree planting, especially medicinal plants, and called upon all to plant trees and to protect them. He endorsed the views expressed by Sabihuddin Ahmed, Secretary Ministry of Environment and Forests, hoping that there will be another detailed discussion covering all spheres of the theme and then come up with some concrete suggestions to formulate policies. The Minister also assured the gathering that if necessary policies and acts will be changed. He concluded by thanking CPD and all concerned for holding the dialogue.

Concluding Remark by the Chair

In a very brief concluding remark, the Chairperson of the dialogue Professor Rehman Sobhan suggested that the unaddressed issues of this dialogue could be taken up for further discussion in a more detailed and realistic manner in the foreseeable future. He, thanked the Minister, the keynote speaker Dr. Nishat, Mr. Junaid, Special Guest Mr. Rahman, the former State Minister and the participants for their valuable contribution to the dialogue.

List of Participants
(in an alphabetical order)

<i>Mr Emaduddin Ahmad</i>	Executive Director, Surface Water Modelling Centre
<i>Mr Md Sabihuddin Ahmed</i>	Secretary, Ministry of Environment & Forests
<i>Ms Salma Akhter</i>	Assistant Professor, Department of Sociology Dhaka University
<i>Mr Mozaharul Alam</i>	Research Fellow, BCAS
<i>Mr Md Shamsul Alam</i>	Professor, Department of Geography & Environment Jahangirnagar University
<i>Dr M Khairul Alam</i>	Divisional Officer, BFRI
<i>Mr S M Shah Alam</i>	Author & Director, RDB
<i>Mr Timoty H Anderson</i>	Food for Peace Officer, USAID
<i>Mr Asaduzzaman</i>	Programme Coordinator, Forum for Regenerative Agriculture Movement
<i>Ms Khodeza Begum</i>	Director, Implementation, Monitoring and Evaluation Division, Ministry of Planning
<i>Ms Sajeda Begum</i>	Project Coordinator, CARE Bangladesh
<i>Mr A H M Billah</i>	Coordinator, Environmental Policy Analysis, BIDS
<i>Mr Mihir Biswas</i>	Member Secretary, Buriganga Banchao Andolon
<i>Ms Caryle Cammisa</i>	Project Development Officer, USAID
<i>Mr Newaz Ahmed Chowdhury</i>	Deputy Director (In charge), BARD
<i>Mr Giasuddin Ahmed Chowdhury</i>	Director General, Water Resources Planning Organization
<i>Mr Junaid K Choudhury</i>	Team Leader, SBCP-IUCN, Bangladesh
<i>Mr Bill Collis</i>	Senior Natural Resources Advisor, Mach Project Winrock, Bangladesh
<i>Mr Anwar Faruque</i>	Chief Conservator of Forests, Department Forest
<i>Mr Iqbal Md Fattah</i>	Senior Programme, Coordinator PROSHIKA
<i>Mr Philip Gain</i>	Director, SHED
<i>Mr Gene V George</i>	Mission Director, USAID
<i>Dr Sadeka Halim</i>	Associate Professor, Sociology Department Dhaka University
<i>Dr A K Enamul Haque</i>	Chairman, Department of Economics, NSU
<i>Mr Daud Harun</i>	Pilot Projects Associate, CIRDAP
<i>Mr A K M Mozibul Hoque</i>	Director, Soil Resources Development Institute
<i>Professor Shahnaz Huq-Hossain</i>	Associate Professor, Dept. of Geography & Environment, University of Dhaka
<i>Mr Aowlad Hossain</i>	Horticulture Manager, BRAC

<i>Mr Sanowar Hossain</i>	Director, Forum for Regenerative Agriculture Movement (FoRAM)
<i>Mr Md Anowar Hossain</i>	APS to Hon'ble Minister for Environment and Forest, Bangladesh Secretariat
<i>Mr Md Altaf Hossain</i>	Deputy Chief, ERD
<i>Mr Aminul Islam</i>	Sustainable Development Advisor, UNDP
<i>Mr Md Shafiqul Islam</i>	Assistant Professor, T&T College
<i>Mr Anwarul Islam</i>	Independent Consultant
<i>Dr Babar Kabir</i>	Programme Coordinator, UNDP-SEMP
<i>Dr Shahriar Kabir</i>	Dept of Environmental Science, Independent University Bangladesh
<i>Professor Amanat Ullah Khan</i>	Chairman, Department of Geography & Environment, University of Dhaka
<i>Mr Rakibul Bari Khan</i>	Social Forestry Specialist, BRAC
<i>Mr Alam Khan</i>	Horticulture Manager, BRAC
<i>Mr Mamunul H Khan</i>	Natural Resources Management Specialist, USAID
<i>Dr Niaz Ahmed Khan</i>	Associate Professor, Department of Public Administration, Chittagong University
<i>Dr Fahmida Akter Khatun</i>	Research Fellow, BIDS
<i>Mr Mahbulul Islam Khan</i>	Coordinator Governance, CARE Bangladesh
<i>Mr Md Sayur Rahman Khan</i>	CDS, CWSSP UNDP-DPHE
<i>Mr Md Zakir Hossain Khan</i>	Teaching Assistant, Dept. of Economics, NSU
<i>Mr Badiul Alam Majumder</i>	Country Director, The Hunger Project
<i>Mr Mahammed Abdul Malek</i>	Assistant Director, BARD
<i>Mr Muhammad Abdul Malek</i>	Statistical Officer, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
<i>Mr Muhammad A Malik</i>	Director, Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics
<i>Dr Azharul Mazumder</i>	Environment Team Leader, USAID
<i>Mr Syed Marghub Murshed</i>	Chairman, Bangladesh Telecommunication Regulatory Commission
<i>Mr A M A Muhith</i>	President, Paribesh Rokkha Spath
<i>Dr Ainun Nishat</i>	Country Representative, IUCN
<i>Mr Johan Norqvist</i>	First Secretary, Embassy of Sweden
<i>Mr Shamsuzzoha Raihan</i>	
<i>Mr H N Ashequr Rahman</i>	Former State Minister for Environment & Forests
<i>Mr Zahedur Rahman</i>	Technical Officer, BAPA
<i>Mr Latifur Rahman</i>	Programme Specialist, USAID
<i>Mr K B S Rasheed</i>	Professor, Dept. of Geography and Environment Dhaka University
<i>Mr Benedict Alo D' Rozario</i>	Director, DMD, Caritas Bangladesh
<i>Mr Raja Debasish Roy</i>	Chakma Chief & Hill Tracts NGO Forum, Senior Advocate, Supreme Court

Mr Mesbah-us-Saleheen	Professor, Dept of Geography & Environment Jahangirnagar University
<i>Mr Shajahan Siraj, MP</i>	Hon'ble Minister for Environment & Forests
<i>Mr Partha Sarathi Sikder</i>	Coordinator, ID PRIP Trust
<i>Mr Istiak Sobhan</i>	Ecologist, Environment and GIS Support (CEGIS)
<i>Mr Md Soeb</i>	Senior Assistant Chief, Ministry of Agriculture
<i>Mr Syed Shah Tariquzzaman</i>	President, NEAB
Mr Md Yeaseen	DSI (opinion) Ministry of Law, Justice and Parliamentary Affairs
<i>Mr M Zaman</i>	Mechanical Engineer

List of Journalists
(in an alphabetical order)

<i>Mr Eraj Ahmed</i>	BSS
<i>Mr Sabbir Ahmed</i>	The News Today
<i>Mr Shafiqul Alam</i>	The Financial Express
<i>Mr Shahabuddin Bablu</i>	The Dainik Inqilab
<i>Mr Dulal Ahmed Chowdhury</i>	The Daily Matribhumi
<i>Ms Mahmuda Choudhury</i>	The Daily Dinkal
<i>Mr Mujtahid Faruqui</i>	The Daily Jugantar
<i>Mr Sarwar Hossain</i>	The Daily Manab Jamin
<i>Mr Nazrul Islam</i>	The Daily Star
<i>Mr Sheikh Noor Islam</i>	The Daily Dhaka Report
<i>Mr Md Shafiul Islam</i>	The Bangladesh Today
<i>Ms Sakila Jesmin</i>	The Daily Arthaneeti
<i>Mr Imam Hossain Masum</i>	Channel I
<i>Mr Arifur Rahman</i>	The Prothom Alo
<i>Mr Lutfor Rahman</i>	The Daily Prothom Prohor
<i>Mr Rafiqul Alam Rana</i>	Dripto Kantha Magazine
<i>Mr Pinaki Roy</i>	The Bhorer Kagoj
<i>Mr Sushanta Sarkar</i>	The Daily Ajker Prottasha
<i>Mr Seliullah Selim</i>	The New Nation
<i>Mr Amal Tanchangya</i>	The Weekly Citizen
<i>Mr Abu Darda Zubair</i>	A T N Bangla