

The Viability of the Chittagong Hill Tracts as a destination for Climate Displaced Communities in Bangladesh

Table of Contents

1. Chapter 1	: Introduction
1.1	: Background
2. Chapter 2	: Historical Context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Region
2.1	: Introduction
2.2	: Pre-British Period: Absence of Private Property Rights in Land
2.3	: British Colonial State: Ownership of all Land under State Control
2.4	: Pakistan Period: Alienation and displacement through State Sponsored and Aid Dependent Development Initiatives
2.5	: Bangladesh Period: Further Denial of Constitutional Rights, Autonomy and Safeguards
2.6	: Signing of the Peace Accord in 1997 Without Addressing the Basic Issues of the Conflict
3. Chapter 3	: Socio-Political Challenges after the Peace Accord
3.1	: Implementation of the Peace Accord
3.2	: Land grabbing after the Peace Accord: Inter-ethnic and Intra-Ethnic Land Grabbing
3.3	: The Peace Accord and Conflict between PCJSS and UPDF
3.4	: Demographic Imbalance: Ethnocide and Ecocide
4. Chapter 4	: Challenges of Environment and Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts
4.1	: Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts
4.2	: Relationship between Development and Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts
4.3	: Issues of Environmental Degradation and Resource Depletion Mechanisms
5. Chapter 5	: Conclusion

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

To face the challenge of both external and internal mass migration and displacement resulting from the effects of climate change, Bangladesh must be adequately prepared so that the vast majority of those to be displaced can be supported with proper resettlement and rehabilitation schemes and projects, whilst not undermining their basic rights and entitlements. One of the major challenges of resettling climate displaced persons will be to increase the availability of affordable, safe and well-located land that can be utilized by those requiring new land resources.

Given the context of low availability of public and private land to accommodate the mass numbers of climate displaced people, this report assesses the viability of the Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) as a possible permanent destination for the relocation of climate displaced communities.

The report begins by examining the historical context of the CHT from the pre-British period to the Bangladesh period, including the signing of the Peace Accord. Chapter three then explores the existing socio-political challenges of the CHT, including the transformation of the demographic composition of the CHT and its effects. Chapter four discusses the environmental and poverty related challenges in the CHT and chapter five provides the conclusions of the report.

2. Chapter 2: Historical Context of the Chittagong Hill Tracts region

2.1 Introduction

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) region, the largest hilly area of Bangladesh covering approximately 13,295 square kilometers, is located at the southeastern corner of Bangladesh. The CHT is bordered by Mizoram and Tripura States in India, Arakan State in Myanmar and Chittagong and Cox's Bazaar districts in Bangladesh.

The CHT region is over 4000 feet high in places, and the hill ranges contain limited cultivable lands that vary distinctly from the fertile multi-yield alluvial plains in the rest of Bangladesh. It has a total land area of about 13,294 square km (about 10% of land area in Bangladesh).¹ The area covers three hill districts (Rangamati, about 6,000 square km, Khagrachari, about 2,700 square km and Bandarban about 4,500 square km). There are 25 Upazilas and 111 Unions in the three Districts of the CHT. Rangamati District comprises 10 Upazilas and 48 Unions, Khagrachari district contains 8 Upazilas and 34 Unions and Bandarban District contains 7 Upazilas and 29 Unions.²

There are twelve ethnicities (11 indigenous ethnicities in addition to Bengalis) living in the CHT. The 11 ethnic multi-lingual minorities are Bawm, Chak, Chakma, Khyang, Khumi, Lushai, Marma, Mro, Pankhua, Tangchangya and Tripura. The largest indigenous groups in the CHT are the Chakma, Marma, Tripura, Mru and Tanchangya, and together they make up about 90 percent of the indigenous population of the region.

The other indigenous peoples of the CHT are the Bawm, Chak, Khumi, Khyang, Lushai and Pankhua.³ These smaller groups are, overall, more vulnerable than the large ones. These indigenous ethnic groups are also differentiated by differences in religious faith and practices. The Buddhists have historically constituted the majority religious group in the CHT, with much smaller numbers of Hindus, Christians, and worshippers of nature.⁴

The CHT is one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable regions in Bangladesh in terms of almost all major development indicators, such as income, employment, poverty, health, water, environment, sanitation, education, female employment, access to infrastructure and national building institutions, peace and inter-community confidence.⁵

Although around 135 persons live per square kilometer in the CHT (according to the 2001 census) compared to the national average of more than 1100 persons, it is a myth

¹ Barkat, Abul. 2009. *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, HDRC & UNDP, Dhaka.

² *Indigenous Peoples Plan, BAN: Second Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project*, 2011. Prepared by ANZDEC Ltd for the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and Asian Development Bank.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Indigenous Peoples Plan, BAN: Second Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project*, 2011. Prepared by ANZDEC Ltd for the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and Asian Development Bank.

⁵ Barkat, Abul. 2009. *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, HCRC & UNDP, Dhaka.

that there are vast amounts of unused land in the CHT. In fact, only 3.2% of the CHT land is suitable for wet-rice cultivation. The bulk of the land (77%) is good for forestry, while the rest of the CHT can support horticulture, *Jum* (shifting or slash and burn agriculture) cultivation and some terrace farming.⁶ The *Jumias* (who practice shifting cultivation or swidden agriculture, locally known as *jum*) constitute 50% of the total population of the region (as of 2010) and they are amongst one of the poorest and most disadvantaged groups in the country.⁷

2.2 Pre-British Period: Absence of Private Property Rights in Land

In the pre-British colonial period, notions of private property rights in land among the *Pahari* ethnic groups were not only absent, but also were unnecessary for their way of life.⁸ The hill slope which was used for *jum* cultivation traditionally belonged to different indigenous communities. Exclusive individual rights to *jum* plots had never been established and community members could claim ownership only over the crops grown on the plots.⁹ Their production system was designed to fulfill subsistence needs through self-provision and prior to the introduction of the plough, *jum* cultivation was the exclusive means of production. The CHT had forested lands far in excess of the requirements of the *Jumia* population at the time.

This kind of farming involved the 'slash-and-burn' method for clearing the land of existing vegetation cover. After being cultivated once, a plot had to be left fallow for a sufficient numbers of years to enable the soil to regain fertility. *Jum* cultivation necessarily involved shifting from plot to plot every year, each of which was cleared, cultivated and abandoned as part of the recurring 'fallow cycle'. Consequently, *jum* cultivation by itself did not require the emergence of a system of private property in land. Three basic factors had critically shaped the historical nature of the land use practices among the swidden-farming *Pahari* groups of the CHT and are essential to understanding the customary land rights among the hill peoples, as well as the subsequent changes in the system of land property in the CHT.¹⁰ These factors are:

- a) The historical availability of sufficient forested area and common lands in relation to the needs of the relatively small population;
- b) The technical conditions of production which ensured the viability of *jum* cultivation and extraction of forest resources; and

⁶ Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

⁷ Khisa, Sudibya Kanti. 2011, *Jum Farming System and Jumias in the Chittagong Hill Tracts* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

⁸ Adnan, Shapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

⁹ Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

¹⁰ Adnan, Shapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

- c) The social organization of jum production, managed by the Pahari communities themselves, without any significant constraints imposed by external agencies such as the state.

Traditionally, individual Pahari families did not cultivate jum in isolation, but as a part of a community of households, all of whom were interlinked with multiple ties of kinship, status and authority. At work was a social organization of production with agreed rules and sanctions for management of *jum* cultivation.

2.3 British Colonial State: Ownership of all Land under State Control

Historically, the CHT had largely been a self-governed independent territory until 1860 when the British took it over as their vassal (Bangladesh District Gazetteer, 1975) and the CHT became formally annexed to the then province of Bengal.¹¹ The British colonizers exploited the communal land use arrangement on the CHT to establish “supreme and unlimited authority” over the land. This is how the CHT land came under direct state control and the hill slopes became the property of the state. The hill people continued to engage in shifting cultivation, but they were levied a *jum* tax to encourage them to shift to sedentary agriculture.¹² In fact the state control over the CHT land left a profound impact on the traditional land-use pattern, including:

- a) Establishment of monopoly rights of the state over different types of land and resources in CHT;
- b) Prohibition of *jum* cultivation and customary uses of forest resources by the hill peoples in the reserve forest areas;
- c) Reduction of total stock of land available for *jum* cultivation;
- d) Promoted plough technology and offered permanent and heritable private land rights to a person or a family; and
- e) Beginning of the erosion of political autonomy of the hill people and stratifications within the hill people.

2.4 Pakistan Period: Alienation and Displacement through State Sponsored and Aid Dependent Development Initiatives

Economic development in the Bengal delta during the Pakistan period was sustained by foreign aid with development planning being accountable to external patrons. The system was mostly top-down, inherently undemocratic and, worked best in a firmly controlled environment.¹³ During the Pakistan period, the *Adivasis* (Indigenous People) of the CHT experienced economic marginalization due to donor dependent development approaches and political alienation through the gradual erosion of the Constitutional safeguards of the “special status of the CHT”. The alienation caused by these factors spread the seeds of politicization among the middle class hill people.

¹¹ Barkat, Abul. 2009. *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, HDRC & UNDP, Dhaka.

¹² Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

¹³ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

The state-sponsored and aid-dependent 'development' initiatives that the Pakistani Government started after independence in 1947 actually began the post-colonial process of devastation in the CHT land. These development initiatives were the Karnaphuli Paper Mill, the Karnaphuli Rayon Mill and the Kaptai Hydroelectric Project, which was supported by International Financial Institutes (IFIs). All of these initiatives created environmental and human catastrophe for the hill people.

Box-1: Testimonies of the development refugees of the Kaptai Hydro Electric Project

---We had no guns so we wept in silence, in humiliation and anger

Shilabrata Tangchangya was completely unprepared when the Kaptai dam uprooted his small village:

'I still hear the booming sounds of the dam gate closing that continued throughout the night. By the morning, the water had reached our doorsteps. We set free our cows and goats, hens and ducks and then began the rush with the affected people to take their rice, paddy, furniture and whatever else possible to the nearby hills. Though every possible belonging was taken to the hill top, many still went to their houses to spend the night. But many of them had to rush out of their houses at the dead of night when the swelling waters touched them while they slept'.

Nripati Ranjan Tripura, who used to live in Kellamura village, remembers:

'Our village was also devoured. We first took shelter on an adjacent hill. The hill was not affected by the inundation in the first year. The water came up to the base of the hill and stopped. During that time it looked like an island. But gradually, in the following months, the sides of the hill began to erode as the waves hit them. It completely went under water in the second year. We had no choice but to move...We had no guns so we wept in silence, in humiliation and anger'.

Source: Cited from Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. History of Bangladesh, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi. Page: 149-150.

The first large-scale industrial development project that hit the CHT was the Karnaphuli Paper Mill (KPM); financed by external resources (US\$13 million) including a World Bank loan of US\$4.2 million.¹⁴ KPM started operation in 1953. The mill had been granted rights for 99 years to extract raw materials from the forest areas. Since its establishment the paper mill has procured millions of tons of bamboo and softwood. The raw material for this paper mill was bamboo, cut from a decommissioned reserved hill forest and floated down the *Karnaphuli* River in enormous rafts.¹⁵ The bamboo and softwood from the native forest is now so decreased in the CHT that there is no alternative to industrial plantation, which severely limits the customary land rights of the hill indigenous people. The construction of the KPM created 10,000 jobs, however, the hill people got only

¹⁴ Arens, Jennek. 1997. *Foreign Aid and Militarization in the Chittagong Hill Tracts* in "Living on the Edge: Essays on the Chittagong Hill Tracts" edited by Subir Bhaumik, Meghna Guhathakurta and Sabyasachi Basu Ray Chaudhury (ed.). South Asia Forum for Human Rights, Calcutta Research Group.

¹⁵ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

around 5% of the lower ranked jobs. The same issues were repeated in the construction of the Karnaphuli Rayon Mill in 1966.¹⁶

Another large scale project that caused mass displacement, discontent and anger among the indigenous people was the Kaptai Hydroelectric Project, which inundated 40% of the prime land of the Hill people in Rangamati and rendered 100,000 people homeless.¹⁷

Pakistan's planners scored a great success when they persuaded foreign aid-givers to finance a huge hydroelectric project in the CHT. The project brought thousands of Bengali workers from the plains and engineers from North America and Europe to this non-Bengali area. By 1961, a dam had been constructed across the Karnaphuli River at a village named *Kaptai*. It was widely celebrated as a triumph of modernity. However, the immense (650 square kilometre) and oddly shaped Kaptai lake had to be filled up. The over-flooded lake inundated many villages and forests and 40% of the arable land in the CHT, displacing about 100,000 people and devastating wildlife, it was a typical example of the failures of top-down development.¹⁸ The electricity generated by the Kaptai project reached the cities in the plains but not in the villages of the Chittagong Hill Tracts.¹⁹

Almost none of the affected people received any compensation, nor did the new project generate employment for them. Some settled around the lake but most were forced to seek refuge in other parts of the Chittagong hills. Tens of thousands could not find a niche and fled to India and Burma. The Indian government settled these development victims in the far-off state of Arunachal Pradesh in the 1960s. Today they and their descendents live as effectively stateless people, eking out a very uncertain existence.²⁰

Box-2: Chakma Raja Tridiv Roy became an environmental refugee through the construction of the Kaptai Hydro Electric Project

Tridiv Roy, son of Nolinashkha Roy, held the throne as the 50th king of the Chakma Circle from 2 May 1953 until the War of Liberation in 1971. He was also the titular head of the Chakma people, a magistrate, a politician and occasionally a member of official delegations abroad. In 1962 he became an environmental refugee as the Kaptai Hydro Electric project was completed and the huge lake flooded the central valleys of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Tridiv's place was one of thousands of homes that disappeared under water. He built a new mansion on one of the new islands in the lake.

Source: Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. History of Bangladesh, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi & The Daily Star, 19 September 2012,

¹⁶ Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

¹⁷ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*

Along with the 'state structured' economic marginalization of the hill people, the constitutional safeguards to the special status of the CHT have also been gradually eroded since the Pakistan period.²¹ The attempts by the Pakistan colonial state to erode constitutional safeguards included:

- a) **Attempts to merge the CHT with the province of East Bengal as an ordinary district:** In 1955 an attempt was made by the Muslim League leaders of East Bengal to merge the CHT with the province of East Bengal as an ordinary district. The move failed. The first Constitution of Pakistan in 1956 thereby retained the special administrative status of the CHT as an 'Excluded Area'. The region had been under the control of the central government since 1947 and the CHT Manual of 1900 provided the basic framework for its administration. This arrangement continued under the 1956 constitution.
- b) **Turning the indigenous population of the CHT into second-class citizens:** According to Clause 15(1) of the Constitution, only a Muslim could hold the position of the Head of the State in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. The entire indigenous population of the CHT had been turned into second-class citizens. In 1962, the status of CHT was changed from an 'Excluded Area' to 'Tribal Area'.
- c) **Undermining the traditional institutions of the CHT through the introduction of a system of basic democracy:** The system of Basic Democracy (BD) was introduced in the CHT. This undermined the traditional institutions of the CHT. Under this system a Basic Democrat member, though a local, had more power and function in the village than a Mouza Headman for all development works.
- d) **Transferring all local indigenous employees in administration to other parts of East Bengal:** By mid-1960s the Government had transferred all local indigenous employees in administration to other parts of East Pakistan. The local administration was now entirely manned by Bengali bureaucrats.
- e) **Did-away totally from the Constitution with the special status position of the CHT:** In 1963 during a visit abroad by President Ayub, the Acting President of Pakistan Fazlul Quader Chowdhury, brought about an amendment in the Constitution of Pakistan and did away totally with the special status provision of the CHT. Despite strong protest from the local leaders, it came into effect in 1964.
- f) **Striking down of power to expel non-Hill people from the CHT area:** In 1964, the Dhaka High Court struck down Rule 51 of the CHT Manual, which had given the DC the power to expel non-Hill people from the area. It was argued that it violated the freedom of movement of citizens within a country - a fundamental right guaranteed in the Constitution of Pakistan. An amendment of Rule 34 was also made which gave non-Hill people, who had resided in the area continuously

²¹ Mohsin, Amena. 1997. *The Politics of Nationalism: The Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*, UPL, Dhaka.

for fifteen years, property rights. These amendments deepened the sense of alienation from the state of Pakistan among the hill people.

Along with the erosion of constitutional safeguards, the growing and class inequality created alienation among the indigenous people, which also spread the seeds of politicization and conflict in the CHT region. The educated middle class among the hill people gradually became more nationalistic, made possible due to the spread of literacy. By 1970 the Chakma literacy rate had risen to 50% and had created a literate middle class, which gradually imbued itself with the ideals of nationalism.²² An underground Pahari Chatra Samiti was formed in 1957, and later on two more underground parties were formed, the CHT Welfare Association and the Rangamati Communist Party (RCP), in 1966 and 1970 respectively. The rise of these political platforms implies that the period of alienation had taken place at two levels among the hill people. First, they were alienated from the Pakistani regime which in their case turned out to be the Bengalis; the Bengali bureaucracy occupied the administration of CHT at the cost of local people, and more importantly, all the constitutional changes to their status were brought about at the behest of Bengali leaders. Secondly, this educated middle class was challenging the traditional structure of the CHT. The formation of RCP bears testimony to this.²³

2.5 Bangladesh Period: Further Denial of Constitutional Rights, Autonomy and Safeguards

After the independence of Bangladesh in 1971, the Hill people were further alienated in the process of nation building. Demands for regional autonomy within Bangladesh surfaced soon after the independence of Bangladesh. In 1972, during the process of drafting the Bangladesh Constitution, a delegation led by Manobendra Narayan Larma (the lone elected Member of Parliament from the CHT) met the then Prime Minister Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman and placed four demands for inclusion in the Constitution; these were:

- i. Autonomy for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, including its own legislature;
- ii. Retention of Regulation 1900 in the Constitution of Bangladesh
- iii. Continuation of circle chief's offices; and
- iv. A constitutional provision restricting the amendment of Regulation 1900 and imposing a ban on the influx of the non-hill people.

The Prime Minister rejected the demands and advised the Hill leaders 'to forget their ethnic identities' and merge with 'Bengali Nationalism'. The Prime Minister threatened the Hill people delegation with the assertion that if they did not abandon their demands for regional autonomy, the Government would initiate massive settlement of Bengalis in the CHT. Eventually, the refugees who returned from India after the 1971 independence war were rehabilitated in the CHT, in some cases expelling the Hill people from their homesteads and grabbing their agricultural lands.²⁴

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Chakma, Bhumitra, 2012. *Bound to be Failed?: The 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts 'Peace Accord'*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

When the first Bangladesh Constitution was promulgated later that year, there was no longer a special provision for the CHT: the new rulers rejected the model of minority autonomy that had been developed in the British period and that today survives in the Constitutions of India and Pakistan. Therefore, the insensitivity of the state rulers to the country's minority cultures was all the more astonishing in view of the long struggle of CHT people for their self-determination.²⁵

This was unacceptable to Larma, and accordingly he formed a regional political platform, the *Parbattya Chattagram Jana Samhati Samiti* (PCJSS) on 7 March 1972. Subsequently an armed wing, *the Shanti Bahini* (SB) was added to it.²⁶ It was in this context that the hill people began referring to themselves collectively as 'Jumma' - a sobriquet denoting their links with hill agriculture (jum).²⁷ The seeds of Jumma nationalism – an identity that the PCJSS claimed for the Hill people - were sown by Sheikh Mujib ur Rahman's refusal to accept the Hill people as a separate community distinct from the Bengalis within the state of Bangladesh. The formation of PCJSS signaled the formal break of the CHT from the state sponsored model of nationhood and the PCJSS emerged as the main mouthpiece for the Hill people.²⁸ The government initiated a process of miniaturization of the CHT and established three full-fledged cantonments (out of total five in the country).²⁹

Following the overthrowing of the Awami League government by a military *coup d'etat* in August 1975, insurgency and counter insurgency started in the CHT region, which continued violently until 1979. The *coup* of 1975 made it impossible for the JSS to operate as a political party, and led to insurgent activity in the Chittagong Hill Tracts that India (which opposed the Zia regime) began to support. General Ziaur Rahman thought that he could eliminate the movement by military force, but this policy backfired spectacularly.³⁰ In fact, the successive governments of Bangladesh viewed the problem from a military and an economic perspective rather than political and adopted a four-pronged strategy, including security, development, demographic and political that only worsened the situation over the years.³¹ During this period the CHT people were further marginalized through a set of top-down policies and country-sponsored projects, that not only instigated conflicts but also displaced CHT people from their places of origin. The impacts of those policies and projects included;

²⁵ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

²⁶ Mohsin, Amena. 2012. *Gendered Nation, Gendered Peace*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

²⁷ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

²⁸ Mohsin, Amena. 2012. *Gendered Nation, Gendered Peace*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

²⁹ Chakma, Bhumitra, 2012. *Bound to be Failed?: The 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts 'Peace Accord'*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

³⁰ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

³¹ Chowdhury, J Nusrat, 2012. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord Implementation in Bangladesh: Ideals and Realities*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

- a) **Bengali Settlement and Displacement of Hill People:** The Government undertook a secret plan of massive transmigration of Bengalis who were landless and primarily from the river erosion prone areas as a counter insurgency strategy. The then Haji Camp in the Chittagong port city was used as the transit point. At first, the landless were allured with the promise that each of the settlers would be provided with 5 acres of agricultural land along with a homestead, construction material, cash assistance, free rations and bank loans.

The transmigration program was implemented in three phases between 1979 and 1985. The available estimates indicate that about 30,000 households roughly 100,000 people were implanted into CHT in the first phase (1979-1981). During the second phase, it is estimated that almost similar numbers were settled in the CHT. According to the same sources, another 250,000 people were reportedly settled in CHT from the plain land. Thus the estimated number of transmigrated population is most likely to be between 350,000 and 450,000. However, about 15% of the transmigrated population left CHT due to alien and inhospitable living conditions there.³²

The third phase of the transmigration program began in July 1982, under the General Ershad regime. Initially, this regime continued with the policy of its predecessor. However, it appears to have taken the decision to discontinue the transmigration program by 1985.³³

The Bengalis had been settled on the argument that vast tracts of land in the CHT were lying empty and the government would settle the Bengalis on *Khas* land. But in reality cultivable lands in the CHT were very limited. The Kaptai Dam, which submerged 40% of the CHT's prime cultivable land, aggravated the situation. By the time the migration of 400,000 Bengalis occurred there was actually no land available to keep the promise that the government made to the settlers. A survey in the 1960s found that only 3.2% or 104,305 acres of land in the CHT were cultivable for all purpose agriculture.³⁴ Even as early as 1918, when the population of the CHT was only 200,000, it was found to be necessary to restrict the migration of people from the plains to the CHT. Therefore, there was hardly any extra cultivable land in the CHT that could accommodate any more people.³⁵

³² Barkat, Abul. 2009. *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, HDRC & UNDP, Dhaka.

³³ Adnan, Swapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

³⁴ Anti -Slavery Society. 1984. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Militarization, Oppression, and the Hill Tribe*.

³⁵ Chakma, Bhumitra, 2012. *Bound to be Failed?: The 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts 'Peace Accord'*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

Table -1: CHT Land Classifications

Use Type	Area	Percentage
Land suitable for rice cultivation	77,000 acres	2
Land suitable for horticulture and tree crops	670,000 acres	21
Land suitable for forest only	1,600, 000 acres	51
Reserve forest	800,000 acres	26
Total	3,147,000 acres	100

Source: Anti-Slavery Society, *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Militarization, Oppression, and the Hill Tribe* (London: Anti-Slavery Society Publication, 1984)

So the alternative left was to give up reserve forest land and uproot the indigenous people from their land, and that is exactly what the government did. It reserved a few thousand acres, which was worth one-tenth of the requirement. Following this, serious abuses against the hill indigenous peoples occurred. Around 100,000 hill indigenous people were ejected under the settlement policy from their traditional land and became homeless. About half of them became refugees in India, while the other half got scattered throughout the CHT to become internally displaced persons (IDPs). The Task force for Refugees in the CHT made its' final list of IDPs public according to which there were 1,283,64 IDP families in the CHT as of May 2000 of which 90,208 were 'tribal' and 38,156 'non-tribal'.³⁶

The government claims that Bengalis have been settled on *Khas* lands, but this is subject to interpretation. In the conception of *Khas* land there are differences between the hill people and Bengali elite. What the government regards as *Khas* land is essentially the hill peoples' traditional *jum* and forest land. For the Hill people this land is common property, belonging to the community members. The government ignores this indigenous view; this is regarded by the Hill people as a gross violation of their inalienable rights.³⁷

- b) Forced Uprooting, Relocation of *Paharis* and Displacement:** From 1976 onwards, as part of a counter insurgency strategy, many *Paharis* uprooted by the security forces were 'forcibly regrouped' into a variety of artificially created settlements, many of which were termed 'cluster villages', varying in terms of their location and ethnic composition. Attempts were often made to 'mix' the ethnic groups in these settlements, so as to hinder any possible forging of solidarity amongst them.³⁸

³⁶ Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

³⁷ Mohsin, Amena. 2012. *Gendered Nation, Gendered Peace*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

³⁸ Adnan, Swapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

The entire area of the CHT was divided into three zones: white, green and red. The white zones covered an area of 3 km adjacent to army headquarters and were jointly populated by Bengali settlers and Hill people. These were considered neutral zones. Bengali settlement areas were identified as green zones. Areas in the interiors of forests and those populated by Hill people alone constituted by red zones and there the military carried out its counter-insurgency operations.³⁹

In some cases, *Paharis* were compelled to undertake so-called 'jungle clearing' activities by the security forces; this involved hard manual labor. Faced with such prospects, many *Paharis* fled across the international border to India or Myanmar.⁴⁰

In 1986 India established six refugee camps to cope with the influx of hill people who refused to be returned to Bangladesh. The CHT war continued under the Ershad (1982-1990) and Khaleda Zia (1991-1996) regimes.⁴¹

- c) Development and Land Grabbing:** In 1976 General Zia declared that the problems of CHT originated from underdevelopment. He therefore founded the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTDB) in 1976 by an ordinance to solve the CHT problems through large scale development programs. The major development interventions in the CHT since then were designed, managed or overseen by the CHTDB. It implemented projects and programs for construction of roads, telecommunication, electrification, as well as moving the hill people into 'model' or 'cluster' villages, which had severe negative impacts on proper land use in the CHT. The roads have been beneficial for transporting produce to markets, but they were first used to facilitate troop movement. Roads helped the military to combat the *Shanti Bahini* as well as the businessman most of whom were Bengalis. The cluster villages were intended to isolate the *Shanti Bahini* and cut their supplies. Even after the peace accord of 1997, there are still several hundred non-permanent military camps spread throughout the CHT⁴².
- d) Development, Deforestation and Land Alienation:** In 1980, the government undertook a scheme to develop rubber plantations in the CHT in order to make the CHT commercially profitable. Accordingly, it allotted more than 550 plots of 25 acres, each on a trial basis, to Bengali entrepreneurs on the understanding that more land (100 acres or more) would be granted on successful performance on the first 25 acres. In this way, more than 14,000 acres of hilly forest land were allotted in the district of Bandarban. Thereafter, a few hundred plots of 25 acres each were allotted to Bengali entrepreneurs in three other districts. The Hill people at this stage were unable to compete on an equal

³⁹ Mohsin, Amena. 2012. *Gendered Nation, Gendered Peace*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

⁴⁰ Adnan, Swapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

⁴¹ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi .

⁴² Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

footing with Bengalis. Thus, the operation of the scheme led to the enrichment of Bengali entrepreneurs and more land alienation for the Hill people. In addition to this, the rubber plantation had detrimental effects on the environment, as it caused soil degradation.⁴³

- e) **Creating Reserve Forest and Alienation of CHT people:** *Jum* has been banned in half of the total area of the CHT for more than a century now in order to create reserve forests (RF) in the land in which Hill people normally cultivate *jum*, which alienates the Hill people from their livelihoods.⁴⁴

2.6 Signing of the Peace Accord in 1997 Without Addressing the Basic Issues of the Conflict

When the Awami League government returned to power in Bangladesh in 1996, India withdrew its support for the autonomy movement and this opened the door for a peace settlement between the *Jana Samhati Samiti* (JSS) and the Dhaka government, signed in 1997.⁴⁵ An important element of the peace accord was that control over land would be as follows, provided in clause 26, under section B of the 1997 Peace Accord:

By amendment of the section 64 the following sub-sections shall be made-

- a. *Notwithstanding anything contained in any law for the time-being in force, no land within the boundaries of Hill District shall be given in settlement, purchased, sold and transferred including giving lease without prior approval of the Council: provided that this provision shall not be applicable in case of areas within the reserved forests, Kaptai Hydro-electricity Project, Betbunia Earth Satellite Station, State-owned industries and factories and lands recorded in the name of government.*
- b. *Notwithstanding anything contained in any law for the time-being in force, no lands, hills and forests within the boundaries of the Hill District shall be acquired and transferred by the government without consultation and consent of the Hill District Council.*
- c. *The Council may supervise and control functions of Headman, Chainman, Amin, Surveyor, Kanungo and Assistant Commissioner (land).*
- d. *Fringe land in Kaptai Lake shall be given in settlement on priority basis to original owners.*

The inherent weakness of the 1997 accord was that it failed to address the basic issues that led to the rise of the conflict and sustained it for so long. Without addressing these

⁴³ Mohsin, Amena. 2012. *Gendered Nation, Gendered Peace*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka

⁴⁴ Mohsin, Amena. 2012. *Gendered Nation, Gendered Peace*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka

⁴⁵ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi

issues, it is unlikely that durable peace can be established in the CHT. Four core issues are noteworthy in this context; first, there is *the identity* of the Hill people as ethnically and culturally distinct from that of Bengalis. Secondly, there is the issue of *Bengali settlement* - that the government pursued as a key anti-insurgency strategy in order to change the demographic structure of the CHT. Thirdly, there is the issue of *land rights*, which is inextricably linked with the issue of Bengali settlement. Fourthly, there is the *demilitarization* of the CHT. The issue of Bengali settlement was not even mentioned in the 1997 accord. Without addressing this issue, it is unlikely that any lasting peace can be established in the CHT. The JSS leaders have claimed that there was an unwritten agreement between the two parties regarding the repatriation of Bengali settlers from the CHT, but the Government rejected the claim. Therefore, it can be concluded that the accord failed to address the main concerns of the Hill people.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Chakma, Bhumitra, 2012. *Bound to be Failed?: The 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts 'Peace Accord'*, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

Chapter 3: Socio-Political Challenges after the Peace Accord

3.1 Implementation of the Peace Accord

The 1997 accord affirmed that administrative arrangements in the CHT would continue to differ somewhat to those in the rest of the country, although far less than the autonomists had demanded. The CHT retained some regional peculiarities, an internal state frontier, in the form of vestiges of indirect rule (the office of three chiefs or rajas), a local system of taxation and land rights and special forms of representations such as a regional council. Despite the settlement, however, peace did not return to the region and ex-JSS members who opposed the settlement continued the fight, now as the United People's Democratic Front (UPDF).⁴⁷

Moreover, the accord did not receive sufficient political support, especially from the main opposition party, the BNP, which called it the 'black pact'.⁴⁸ In the CHT, the Bengali settlers protested the government's move on the plea that it would result in the insecurity of the settler community. The *Somo Odhikar Andolon* (Equal Rights Movement), a Bengali settler organization that sprung up following the accord, brought out procession (demonstration) protesting the decision. Such incidents only demonstrate the fragility of the situation existing in the hills.⁴⁹

Box-3: Somo Odhikar Andolan (Equal Rights Movement)

The Somo Odhikar Andolan Parishad (Equal Rights Movement Party) and its student wing, the Parbatya Bangali Chatra Parishad (Hill Bengali Students' Council) were established in 1999. The former was established with the strong support of Abdul Wadud Bhuiyan, a former MP of the BNP from Khagrachari constituency. Somo Odhikar has opposed the CHT Accord and demanded an equal share for Bengalis in any dispensation intended for CHT indigenous peoples.

Somo Odhikar enjoyed the patronage of the BNP during its rule. Wadud Bhuiyan, who was recognized as the de facto leader of the organization, appointed the leaders of Somo Odhikar as members of the Hill District Councils. The Adi O Sthayee Bangalee Kalyan Parishad (ASBKP), an organization of permanent Bengali residents (those who settled in the CHT before the government commenced state-sponsored migration) who supported the implementation of the CHT Accord, was pressurized to join the activities of Somo Odhikar. On July 20, 2007, Somo Odhikar organized a district conference at the office of the Khagrachari Contractors' Association. It was during the State of Emergency under the Caretaker Government which prohibited such gatherings, and many people see this as evidence of the army's support for the activities of this organization.

⁴⁷ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

⁴⁸ Jamil, Istiaq & Panday, K Pranab. 2012. The Elusive Peace Accord in the CHT of Bangladesh and the Plight of Indigenous People, in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

⁴⁹ Mohsin, Amena. 2011. *Politics and Politicization in the CHT, Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

Furthermore, successive Bangladesh governments have failed to implement the most important provisions of the settlement. These include the rehabilitation of all returned refugees and internally displaced people, restoration of land confiscated from the hill people during the war, withdrawal of non-permanent army camps from the Chittagong Hill Tracts and transfer of power to the local administration. As a result, the Chittagong Hill Tracts is the only part of Bangladesh that remains under tight military control, despite the fact that the rest of Bangladesh has long returned to civilian rule.⁵⁰

The military has been in total control of the CHT administration since the insurgency problem started in mid 1970s. Though *Shanti Bahini* action had provided the state with a pretext for this move, it is equally true that a military solution to the CHT issue served the vested interests of the military as well.⁵¹

This brief review of the overall situation and trends indicates that, first, little substantive progress has been made in the implementation of most of the key clauses of the Accord concerned with resolving land disputes and restituting the illegally occupied lands of the indigenous people (IP). Secondly, Pahari lands (Hill lands) and settlements continue to be the target of forcible occupation by Bengali settlers, interest groups and state agencies. Thirdly, given these ongoing trends, it appears unlikely that such attempts to drive the indigenous people off their lands will be stopped in the foreseeable future, unless decisive steps are taken by the government, the Hill peoples and other concerned agencies.⁵²

According to the 2011 CHT Commission Report, apprehensions have already been expressed about possible revision of the CHT Accord to suit the interests of Bengali social groups, commercial groups and agencies of the state at the expense of the IP, for example, by legitimizing the occupation of Pahari lands illegally grabbed during the post-Accord period.⁵³

During field work discussions, local respondents identified the following critical problems for the peace and stability of the CHT:

- Land grabbing;
- Internal clashes between the JSS and the UPDF;
- Ransom & *Chandabajee*;
- Rohingya armed groups in Bandarban and Cox's Bazaar and Religious Extremism;

⁵⁰ Schendel, Willem Van, 2009. *History of Bangladesh*, Cambridge University Press, New Delhi.

⁵¹ Chowdhury, Nusrat J. 2012. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord Implementation in Bangladesh: Ideals and Realities* in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

⁵² Adnan, Shapan & Dastidar, Ranajit. 2011. *Alienation of the Lands of Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, CHTC & IWGIA, Dhaka.

⁵³ *Ibid*

3.2 Land grabbing after the Peace Accord: Inter-ethnic and Intra-Ethnic Land Grabbing

According to the 2011 CHT Commission report, as of 2010, there were many different agencies involved in land grabbing in the CHT. These include the Forest Department, the civil administration, the security forces, business corporations, commercial NGOs, plantation leaseholders, political leaders, land dealers and settlers. The indigenous people of the CHT are thus facing simultaneous threats on multiple fronts, with many different groups and agencies forcibly occupying their lands, using a whole range of distinct mechanisms. Land grabbing in the CHT by commercial agencies and power holders reflects a complex trend. It involves grabbing of the lands of not only the IP but also those of ordinary Bengali settlers. The overall pattern subsumes both *inter-ethnic* and *intra-ethnic* land grabbing, propelled by the forces of growing capitalism and privatization.

The loss of land rights of the indigenous people is integrally related to the power relations and political contentions characterizing the CHT, subsuming both ethnic and class conflicts. The antecedent forces driving the grabbing of *Pahari* lands cannot be fully explained without explicitly taking account of the political economy and political demography of the region. However, this report is not able to explore an integrated analysis of the entire chain of causation driving land alienation processes in the CHT.⁵⁴

3.3 The Peace Accord and Conflict between PCJSS and UPDF

The UPDF refused the accord on the ground that the provisions were not consistent with their demand of autonomy, do not recognize their identity and rights over land and were not constitutionally protected. They feel that the government, instead of the hill people, benefited them from the accord. The ideological conflict between PCJSS and UPDF turned into armed fighting that resulted in the downslide of the law and order situation in the CHT. The conflict created instability in the CHT and divided the people there, which, in turn, made the implementation of the accord uncertain. The vested groups are benefiting from this internal conflict.⁵⁵

BOX- 4: PCJSS-UPDF clashes turn CHT volatile

The recent incidents of killing and abduction, especially in the wake of violent clashes between pro-peace treaty Parbatya Chattagram Jana Sanghati Samity (PCJSS) and anti-peace treaty United People's Democratic Front (UPDF), has made the Chittagong Hill Tracts region tense again. "Armed groups of both PCJSS and UPDF have become desperate to control hill areas and collect tolls from commoners. Involved in killing, abduction and extortion, they are trying to overthrow each other," Rangamati Superintendent of Police Masood-ul-Hasan told this correspondent yesterday.

⁵⁴ Adnan, Shapan & Dastidar, Ranajit. 2011. *Alienation of the Lands of Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, CHTC & IWGIA, Dhaka

⁵⁵ Chowdhury, Nusrat J. 2012. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord Implementation in Bangladesh: Ideals and Realities* in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace : A Case of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

Six PCJSS men and one from UPDF were killed in a gunfight between the armed members of the two rival organisations at remote Fakirachhara Bastipara in Moidang Union under Jurachharai upazila of Rangamati district on Friday. On the same day, an activist of PCJSS was gunned down allegedly by the armed men of UPDF at Gaborchhara village in Rikhali union under Rajasthali upazila of the district.

As a signatory to the 1997 CHT peace deal, the PCJSS wants its implementation in full. PCJSS leaders are blaming the government for 'dilly-dallying' in the implementation of the peace accord. The UPDF, on the other hand, termed the peace treaty 'not sufficient for the jummo people'. They are demanding full autonomy in the CHT for 'lasting peace' there.

PCJSS leaders at protest rallies on different occasions said that armed activists of the UPDF are killing PCJSS leaders and activists and extorting common people, particularly indigenous people. They urged the government to ban the UPDF to 'remove the main barrier in the way to implementing the peace deal'. The UPDF also blamed the PCJSS for killing and kidnapping their leaders and activists and collecting tolls from common people.

Source: The daily Star, Jan.23, 2011, <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=171174>

3.4 Demographic Imbalance: Ethnocide and Ecocide

The present ethnic and religious composition of the CHT is strikingly different from what it was a century ago. In 1872, the CHT population had been almost entirely Pahari (98%). In comparison, the non-Paharis (mostly Bengali) accounted for a minuscule minority (2%). Even up to 1951-1956, the various Pahari groups together accounted for 90 percent of the CHT population, with Bengalis comprising most of the remainder. However, by 1991, the share of all the Hill peoples declined drastically to around half (51.4%) of the CHT population. Correlatively, the share of Bengalis rose dramatically from around 9 percent in 1951-1956 to 48.5 percent in 1991. It is evident that the ethnic composition of the CHT has been profoundly transformed during the second half of the twentieth century.⁵⁶ A demographic transition in the CHT thus occurred rapidly, as can be observed in the following tables and figures.

Table-2: Population growth in the CHT from 1901 to 1991

Year	Population	Increase (%)
1901	124,762	
1911	153,830	23.2%
1921	173,243	12.6%
1931	212,922	22.9%
1941	247,053	16.0%
1951	287,274	16.3%
1961	385,079	34.0%
1974	508,179	32.0%
1981	746,026	46.8%

⁵⁶ *Indigenous Peoples Plan, BAN: Second Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project*, 2011. Prepared by ANZDEC Ltd for the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affaires and Asian Development Bank.

1991	994,465	33.3%
2001	1,333,000	34.04%
2011	1,598,231	19.89%

Source: Bangladesh District Gazetteers, 1975; Population Census of Bangladesh 1974, 1981, 1991, 2011.⁵⁷

Table-3: Pahari and Bengali Population in the CHT from 1872-2011

Year	Pahari	%	Bengali	%	Total
1872	61,957	98%	1,097	2%	63,054
1901	1,16,000	93%	8,762	7%	1,24,762
1951	2,61,538	91%	26,150	9%	2,87,688
1981	4,41,776	59%	3,04,873	41%	7,46,649
1991	5,01,144	51%	4,73,301	49%	9,74,445
2001	592,977	44%	740,023	56%	1,333,000
2011	845,541	53%	752,690	47%	1,598,231

Over the entire period 1872-2011, the population of the CHT increased more than 25 times from 63,054 to 1,598,231. However, the magnitude of growth is highly different for different ethnic groups. The number of Paharis increased more than 13 times from the base figure in 1872, the Bengalis increased by more than 686 times from the corresponding starting times. Moreover, the course of population growth was very different for Paharis and Bengalis. From 1872 to 1951, the population size of Paharis was bigger than Bengalis. However, between 1951 and 1981, the Bengali population rose dramatically from 9% to 41%. The increase of Bengali population continued up to 2001, from 2001 to 2011 the percentage Pahari population increased in CHT. This sharp upturn in the Bengali population is almost certainly attributable to the massive transmigration program, superimposed upon the on-going process of in-migration and natural growth.⁵⁸

BOX 5: Case Story - Kashem, an internally displaced person expecting to get Khas land in Rangamati

Mr. Abul Kashem (32), migrated to Rangamati in 1988. Kashem was born and brought up in Barisal, a coastal district of Bangladesh. Due to river erosion, Kashem lost his homestead and all of his belongings. After that his family moved to different places in Barisal, working as a day laborer some times or as agriculture laborer, passing days with severe hardship. One of his relatives was transmigrated to Rangamati with his family and received land for cultivation and rations regularly. Through his relative, Kashem migrated to Rangamati. At the beginning he was working as a day laborer, however, now he is working as a helper of a bus. Kashem lives on government land, in a built house near Shimultali hill. When he started building his house, the local Pahari people resisted him. He responded, it is government land, I have rights to it as I am landless. The administration and security forces did not create any problems for him. His wife collects timber from a nearest area for cooking. His son is reading

⁵⁷ Cited from Chkma, Bhumitra. 2012. *Bound to be failed?: The 1997 Chittagong Hill Tracts 'Peace Accord'* in Nasir Uddin (ed.) *Politics of Peace: A Case of The Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh*, ICDR, Dhaka.

⁵⁸ Adnan, Shapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

in school. He remains tense from the political turmoil and is fearful of the Pahari people as there is a risk that they will evict him from the area. He has a good relationship with the Bengali people but no relationships with the Pahari people. According to Kashem, the Pahari people dislike them and don't support them. He is expecting to receive Khas land from the Government.

Source: Mr. Abul Kashem was interviewed on 18 Oct.2012 at Shimultali of Rangamati.

Table-4: Indigenous and Non- Indigenous (IP and NIP) Population in CHT 2001

District	IP	%	NIP	%	Total	%
Khagrachari	192,647	36	333,353	64	526,000	100
Rangamati	257,679	51	251,321	49	509,000	100
Bandarban	142,651	48	155,349	52	298,000	100
Total	592,977	44	740,023	56	1,333,000	100

Table-5: Indigenous and Non- Indigenous (IP and NIP) Population in CHT 2011

District	IP	%	NIP	%	Total	%
Khagrachari	316987	51.633527	296930	48.366473	613917	100
Rangamati	356153	59.7593204	239826	40.2406796	595979	100
Bandarban	172401	44.3949168	215934	55.6050832	388335	100
Total	845,541	52.9048054	752690	47.0951946	1,598,231	100

The Bengali population in the CHT is usually grouped in two categories, the *adi* (original) Bengalis and the settlers (those who migrated during the last 30 years, 1978-2008). The *adi* Bengalis have been living in the CHT region for a long time, but a large number of Bengalis have transmigrated from outside the three CHT districts since 1977-1978. The accompanying survey attempted to estimate the composition of the Bengali population in-terms of *adi* (original) Bengalis (who lived in the CHT for more than 30 years) and transmigrated Bengalis (who lived in the CHT since 1977-78). It is revealed that about 62% of the Bengali population in rural CHT had been living there for less than 30 years. This implies that close to two-thirds of the current Bengali population in CHT come from the transmigrated population.⁵⁹

Migration is a natural flow, and beyond the state sponsored political migration, poor people, mostly landless due to river erosion, migrated to CHT after that period. Migration is also a continuous process, which contributed to the increase in population size of Bengali people in the CHT. They are working there as day laborers, traders, shop keepers, rickshaw pullers, transport workers and craftsmen of various trades (see for example, Case Story - Box 5). As observed over 1998-2002, many of these migrants had also acquired land in the CHT through legal and illegal means. The Bengali officials in the

⁵⁹ Barkat, Abul, 2009. *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, HDRC & UNDP, Dhaka.

civil administration were reported to be favorably disposed towards their fellow plainsmen, facilitating them in acquiring rights on Pahari lands.

Box 6: Case Story 2 - Chan Mian did not get possession of the allotted land

Mr. Mohammad Chan Mian (42), VDP Commander, is living in a Kaokhali Gucchagram (Cluster Village) in Rangamati. Chan Mian has been living here for more than 32 years. He is married and have four children.

Chan Mian was displaced due to river erosion in Barisal. After the displacement, the Government took him to the Chittagong Hazi Camp and he was under the responsibility of the Government at that time in the camp. After that, the Government arranged his settlement in the cluster village in Rangamati, established in 1988. The Government allotted him 5 acres of land, however, he only received possession of 1.75 acres. It was not possible to take possession of the land due to having the presence Shanti Bahini.⁶⁰ At the beginning there were 112 families in this cluster village, however, now there are only 46 families. They left the cluster village after being threatened and tortured by the Pahari people and not being able to get the possession of the allotted land.

Source: Interview was taken at Kaokhali, Rangamati on 18 Oct.2012

Through focus group discussions and interviews during field visits, it was revealed that many settlers had no idea about the conflict in the area, they simply thought that they were positively and hopefully responding to a government offer to provide free land to landless and poor families. Settlers didn't know the causes of conflict in the hill tracts and they became victim of the conflict and counter insurgency strategy at that time. It has been found that insecurity of life and property arising from the threat of attacks by the *Shanti Bahini* made it impossible for some of the settlers to take possession of the land allotted to them and live and work on the lands (for example, see Case Story 2). For some settlers, the administration has arranged alternative habitations where Bengali settler families without access to land could live.

Box 7: Perspective of Bengali People living in the CHT

- *If Hill people can work and purchase land in any place of Bangladesh, why can't we purchase land in CHT? Why do Bengali people have to take permissions from many agencies? This is discrimination against Bengalis*
- *If the army camp was not here, it would be difficult for Bengalis to live in CHT*
- *The Hill people receive 90 percent of Government employment opportunities in this area; though there is equal ratio between Bengali and Pahari; why is there such discrimination?*
- *The UNDP project is mostly for Paharis; we are being deprived*
- *Bengali people don't recognize the customary land rights of the Hill people "tader kono common land nai"*
- *Bengali people are fearful of full implementation of the Accord; they are fearful that the land commission will take away their land*

⁶⁰ An Armed wing of PCJSS, who were fighting for autonomy in CHT for long

- *The Bengali people consider Pahari people as outsiders and intruders to the CHT region, since they migrated from either Myanmar or India.*

Through field visits, it has been observed that many Bengali households living in the cluster villages have no secured livelihoods, and in the rainy season they migrate to plain land for work; they depend mostly on government rationing. However, the entire ration distribution system is plagued by massive corruption and malpractice. The poor Bengalis have distrust regarding the Hill people; they don't want to recognize the customary land rights of the ethnic people. They believe that due to the Hill people, they are being deprived. The CHT is part of Bangladesh, so they feel there should be equal rights between Pahari and Bengalis. Their perspective is described in box 7.

The uprooting of Paharis and the transmigration of Bengali settlers, resulting from the armed conflict, brought about a profound transformation and created massive relocation and spatial displacement leading to changes in social structure. The drastic nature of these changes has also given rise to a legacy of virtually irresolvable economic and political problems in the CHT. Foremost among these are the forcible or illegal takeovers of the private and common lands of the Hill peoples by the newcomers and the ethnic conflict between them. In addition to this, socio-demographic disruptions on this scale, backed by violence, have also posed threats to the very existence of the small ethnic Pahari communities. The fear of extinction, as well as ethnocide, continues to haunt the Hill peoples of the CHT even today.⁶¹

The Government policy of Bengali settlement has far reaching consequences for the land and indigenous peoples of the CHT. The land in the CHT simply cannot sustain the population that it now has. Both ethnocide and ecocide are evident because of demographic imbalance and the land use policies of the government.⁶²

⁶¹ Adnan, Shapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

⁶² Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

Chapter 4: Challenges of Environment and Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

4.1 Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

The concept of poverty is defined in terms of the *flows* of current consumption of goods and other essentials, access to such flows can depend upon rights and control over adequate *stocks* of assets, such as land and capital. Consequently, the loss of property rights and access to the key means of production, including land, forests and water resources can play a critical role in making people poor.⁶³ The stock of natural resources is declining due to environmental degradation caused by many factors, and access to natural property rights of the people of CHT are gradually eroding.

A baseline study conducted by Barkat and associates highlights that the CHT is a food deficit region of the country, and that the whole issue of improving food security status deserves special attention.

'Food Poverty' is widespread in CHT. Most indigenous peoples in CHT are not secured in relation to availability of food during most of the year; *Ashar* (June-July) and *Sravan* (July-Aug) are the worst months. However, for the Bengalis, the food security status is better as compared to the indigenous peoples. According to the Direct Calorie Intake (DCI) method, 62% households in the region irrespective of ethnicities are living below absolute the poverty line (below 2, 122 k.cal), while about 36% are facing hardcore poverty (below 1,805 k.cal). Poverty is relatively less pronounced among the Bengalis with about 59% of Bengali households are absolutely poor and about 31% in hardcore poverty. The prevalence of absolute poverty and hardcore poverty among indigenous peoples are 65% and 44% respectively. About three-fourth of the households (74%) are living below the lower poverty line (<Tk.866/ person/month) and 86% below the upper poverty line (<Tk.1, 025/ person/month), according to the CBN method. Households living below lower and upper poverty lines are 78% and 89% respectively among indigenous people, and 69% and 83% respectively among Bengali households. Households below the lower poverty line range between 100% for Lushai and 71% for Chakma and households below upper poverty line range between 100% for Lushai and 84% for Chakma.⁶⁴

During our field visit, it has been found that during the rainy season (*Asar* & *Sravan* month), the poor people in CHT, both Pahari and Bengali, face economic crises due to the decrease of scope of work; sometimes they also suffer from starvation. A small shop owner (tea stall) from the Bengali community said that he faces hardship during political turmoil; he has to shut down the shop during those times. They resort to different coping strategies to overcome the crises. These include:

⁶³ Adnan, Shapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

⁶⁴ Barkat, Abul. 2009. *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, HDRC & UNDP, Dhaka.

- *Seasonal migration (Bengali) as day laborer/agriculture labor/brickfield worker in the nearest areas like Chittagong, Rauzan and Rangunia;*
- *Working as a day laborer;*
- *Selling bamboo (mostly Pahari);*
- *Taking loans from relatives or NGOs;*
- *Working as day laborer and depending on rations provided by the Government;*
- *In the political turmoil, they remain united and cooperate with each other (Bengali).*

Through focus group discussions and interviews, it has been found that cultivation of cash crops like ginger, aroid, and turmeric horticulture, agro-forestry practices and tree and fruits (pine apple, jack fruit, lemon) farming has had a positive impact on their livelihoods. A number of respondents stated that selling seasonal fruits and bamboo has increased their income and supported livelihoods for indigenous people. According to respondents, *bagan kara* (gardening) is very profitable and it has a positive impact on household level income enhancement and food security.

Cash cropping in CHT also increased demand for engagement of farm labor as well as increased on-farm productivity increased demand for employment of poor households' labor in land preparation, planting, weeding and harvesting. This also resulted in higher wage rates in the locality, which generated livelihood support for the poor, who are predominantly dependent on locally produced goods and services. This created jobs and income for members of poor households.⁶⁵

The baseline study also mentioned that the major source(s) of drinking and cooking water in CHT are not safe. People travel long distances to fetch drinking water, which in turn takes a substantial amount of time off from their daily livelihood. In the dry season, regardless of the communities, almost all experience inadequate supply of water. Moreover, there is widespread gender discrimination in collection of water: it is the female members of household who suffer most due to water scarcity and inadequate hygiene situation.⁶⁶

4.2 Relationship between Development and Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts

The anthropologist Lorenz Loffler travelled through in the CHT in 1991. He noted a striking paradox in the relationship between 'development' and poverty among the Hill peoples of CHT:

"Once upon a time, the Chittagong Hill Tracts were not only rich in timber and bamboo, but they also produced a surplus of paddy and cotton. Hard-working farmers were ---- comparatively well off, and really needy people were few in number. Nowadays, after millions of dollars of development aid have been spent needy people abound, rice and cotton have to be imported, and timber and bamboo have become so scarce that the formerly magnificent houses of the indigenous people gave way to poor huts".

⁶⁵ Khisa, Sudibya Kanti. 2011, *Jum Farming System and Jumias in the Chittagong Hill Tracts* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

⁶⁶ Barkat, Abul. 2009. *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, HDRC & UNDP, Dhaka.

The donor driven and top-down approaches of development planning contributed mechanisms that lead to the loss, reduction and degradation of the total amount of resources, such as land, water, forests and fisheries both stocks and flows affecting incomes and consumption. The following section will elaborate on these critical issues.

4.3 Issues of Environmental Degradation and Resource Depletion Mechanisms

Environmental degradation and resource depletion mechanisms are the major determining factors of creating poverty among the people of CHT. Decline in the aggregate stock of land and forests, as well as changes in their distribution between the Paharis and non-Paharis, constitute factors that are likely to have critical roles in explaining the causation of poverty in the specific socio-historical context of CHT.⁶⁷

The environmental issues have not been directly addressed in the accord, despite the huge environmental problems being faced in the CHT, including deforestation, mono-plantation and industrial logging, siltation of rivers and lakes, floods, the drying up of streams, springs and other aquifers and the arbitrary killing of rare species of wildlife, including elephants, bison and bears for sale in a black market that is linked to Southeast Asia and Hong Kong.⁶⁸

In our field visits, from focus group discussions and informant interviews with indigenous people and Bengalis, respondents identified soil erosion and land slides caused by deforestation, increase of population in CHT and changes of intensity of rain, as the major environmental problems they faced. They mentioned that forests have become denuded due to illegal logging and using wasteful methods of timber extraction from the natural forest the CHT by both public agencies and illegal loggers. Tobacco cultivation and the number of brickfields are increasing in the CHT. The processing of tobacco requires fuel wood from the adjoining hill forests. Demand for fuel-wood from the growing number of brickfields all over the CHT has been another contributing factor for environmental degradation.

The gradual depletion of natural resources like water and bamboo has a negative impact on the livelihoods of people living in the CHT. They also said that the production of cereals is decreasing due to decrease of agricultural land, affecting the income and consumption of the people of CHT. They mentioned that these have chain reaction for environmental degradation in the CHT; these include a decline in soil fertility, an increase in soil erosion, declining retention of water and the loss of natural habitats and biodiversity.

A recent study of water resources in the CHT notes that there is an observed deterioration of spring flows over the past several years. The most significant causes

⁶⁷ Adnan, Shapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

⁶⁸ Roy, Devasish. 2012. *Challenges towards the Implementation of the Chittagong Hill Tracts Accord of 1997* in (ed.) Nasir Uddin, *Politics of Peace: A Case in the Chittagong Hill Tracts in Bangladesh*, Institute of Culture & Development Research, Dhaka.

behind this are related to degradation of forest quality and substantive loss in canopy coverage.⁶⁹ The main underlying causes identified during the study are:

- Widespread degradation of natural dense forest;
- Large changes in land use;
- Changes in climate; and
- Physical intervention constructed without understanding the effects on surrounding environment (such as road construction).

Box 8: Tobacco cultivation poses threat to the environment in the CHT

Tobacco cultivation is posing a threat to the forests, environment, agriculture, and to public health in the CHT. In the reserved or other categories of forest land tobacco cultivation takes place illegally allegedly in connivance with the dishonest forest officials. In the CHT, tobacco cultivation started after 1990 with assistance from some local and multinational companies. Although tobacco cultivation is strictly prohibited, the tobacco companies are doing brisk business, violating the rules. Besides, they motivate the farmers openly by offering incentives in cash and kind to cultivate tobacco. At least 60-70,000 metric tones of firewood are being burnt in 2,000 tobacco processing kilns every year, causing depletion of reserve and natural forests, threatening environment and ecology in the hills, environmentalists said. They said tobacco cultivation leaves a bad impact on the soil fertility and once tobacco is cultivated it is difficult to grow other crops on the same land. The hill people in many instances are compelled to surrender their land for tobacco plantation. Some 7,000 farmers are involved with tobacco farming in the CHT, sources at Agriculture Extension Department (AED) said. Most of the farmers in Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari have been losing their interests in cultivating indigenous crops like paddy, banana, maize, sesame, cotton potato and pumpkin as they became defaulters of loans provided by tobacco companies, they said. Farmers and labourers said staff of tobacco companies offer lucrative amount of money as loans to trap them. Sometimes the companies provide them with bank loans for agriculture along with tobacco seeds, fertiliser, polythene bags and high-powered pesticides like Diaconal, fertilisers of BSP, BAP, FMC and SOB and DDT powder.

British American Tobacco Bangladesh (BATB) sources said farmers receive bank loans as per the rules of Bangladesh Bank and each farmer gets Tk 6,000 for an acre of cultivable land. They said farmers get money by selling dried leaves and the company purchases leaves from them and adjust the loans that they provide. Bindu Bikash Chakma, a tobacco cultivator at Mynee under Dighinala in Khagrachhari, said he has been cultivating tobacco for the last ten years but hardly got any benefit. Farmers Abani Kumar Chakma, Aunglahpru Marma and Sarafat Ali in Khagrachhari also echoed the same. They have been cultivating tobacco on 1,200 acres of land in Bandarban. Dhaka Tobacco, Abul Khair Tobacco, Nasir Tobacco, KB Group Tobacco, RB Group Tobacco and Rangunia Samity also cultivate tobacco in the hills, sources said.

A group of journalists during a recent visit found massive tobacco farming in Kaptaj, Barkal, Rajasthali, Baghaichhari, Jurachhari, Longudu and Bilaichhari areas in Rangamati. Tobacco is also largely produced at Ruma, Lama, Alikadam, Thanchi, Nikhyangchhari, Rowangchhari

⁶⁹ *Indigenous Peoples Plan, BAN: Second Chittagong Hill Tracts Rural Development Project, 2011. Prepared by ANZDEC Ltd for the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and Asian Development Bank.*

and Sadar upazilas in Bandarban and at Dighinala, Mainee valley, Panchhari and Ramgarh in Khagrachhari. Sources said about 5,000 farmers have cultivated tobacco this year in Bandarban alone. Besides, 2,626 hectares of lands were brought under tobacco cultivation in Bandarban (2,312 hectares), Khagrachhari (209 hectares) and Rangamati (105 hectares) last year. Last year, the total production was 5,758 metric tones (MT) worth about Tk 100 crore. Of this, 5,440MT were produced in Bandarban, 209MT in Khagrachhari and 109MT in Rangamati.

11 tones of firewood is needed to process tobacco leaves grown on two acres of land. Now one can imagine-what a quantity of firewood has to be burnt in just one year!

Source: The Daily Star, 21 May 2009 <http://www.thedailystar.net/newDesign/news-details.php?nid=89101>, and Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka

Activities that caused environmental and natural resource degradation in CHT are described below:

- a) Jum Cultivation:** *Jum* is often described as destructive, primitive and outdated based on the belief that overlooks the *Jumias'* traditional knowledge, which has been accumulated over generations while adapting itself to the bio-physical and socio-economic environment. Land pressures have impacts on traditional land use practices. *Jum* cultivation is symptomatic of a local subsistence economy, which is very labor intensive. About 88% of *Jumias* belongs to Chakma, Tripura and Marma communities. The current ratio of indigenous people and Bengali communities in CHT is estimated to be 50:50; this creates pressure on agricultural land. Pressures on land during the past two or three decades have forced *jumias* to reduce the *jum* fallow period, which is crucial in order to maintain land productivity, from the traditional time period of 10 to 20 years to 3 to 5 years on average today, thereby severely affecting the fertility of the soil and productivity of *jum* farming system.⁷⁰

Farming/cultivation (through plough) is the occupation of 18% of the total population in CHT. *Jum* cultivation is the occupation of 14% of the indigenous population. The cultivation technologies practiced in CHT for crop culture are plough and *jum*, depending upon the suitability of the land. Nearly two-thirds of rural households are farming households. One-third (34%) households are involved in field cropping only, about one-fifth (19%) are involved in *jum* only, and a small proportion (9%) does both field and *jum* agriculture. Plough and *jum* cultivation have been found in more than half of all indigenous peoples' households while most of the Bengali households depend on plough agriculture.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Khisa, Sudibya Kanti. 2011, *Jum Farming System and Jumias in the Chittagong Hill Tracts* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

⁷¹ Barkat, Abul. 2009. *Socio-Economic Baseline Survey of Chittagong Hill Tracts*, HDRC & UNDP, Dhaka.

b) Industrial Plantation and Mono-Culture: In CHT, Mono culture plantations with exotic species are the most destructive to the ecological balance, affecting both life and livelihoods in the forest dependent communities; including pulpwood, rubber, agro forestry, woodlot and tick pine. These plantations are short rotation, which according to forestry experts are not forests at all and are the major threat to local forest dependent communities and environments. Insect attack and diseases in the mono-culture plantations are also reported. Total devastation takes place during the harvest time of plantations. This is a clear case of ecocide best illustrated in the *Sal* forest and the pulp wood plantation areas in the CHT. Ecological damage caused by rubber plantation is unprecedented. Though the rubber plantations looks green, it is a desert to other plant species, birds and wildlife. In CHT such plantations have been established mainly on the traditional *jum* land and have caused loss of biodiversity and soil erosion. These have caused severe threat to the small ethnic communities and have caused massive destruction to the local ecology. These have brought in outsiders who forcefully have occupied the land that the indigenous communities have used for generations.⁷²

Displacement of human communities is another consequence of a plantation economy. Industrial plantations have displaced ethnic communities from their roots; they were evicted mostly without notice and the customary rights of the local communities are nullified. They became landless and day laborers. Thousands of acres of the common lands of the Hill peoples have been handed over by the civil administration to non resident members of the Bengali elite as private leaseholder for rubber plantations, fruit gardens, horticulture, etc. This complex form of 'redistributive' expropriation has involved the initial 'enclosure' of the common lands of the Paharis by the state in order to convert these into private holdings of privileged individuals and families. There have been instances of traditional Pahari office-holders, such as the village Karbari and Headman, being involved in the transfer of rights to common lands, either to themselves or to Bengali settlers. A section of the Pahari elite has thus made personal gains from this form of private appropriation of the common lands of the Hill peoples.⁷³

Some Headmen and Karbaris have forsaken their traditional roles as custodians of the land rights of the indigenous people and have made private settlements (or leases) on common lands that they had previously shared with the rest of their communities. In other instances, Headmen are reported to have taken bribes for giving their recommendations for transfer of the common lands of their communities to Bengalis from outside. Some Headmen and Karbaris are alleged to be operating as land dealers who buy cheap from ordinary Paharis and resell at a profit to outsiders. Such activities are likely to have facilitated the

⁷² Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

⁷³ Adnan, Shapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

capability of commercial agencies and power holders, noted above, to get hold of land settlement documents to justify their grabbing of Pahari lands.⁷⁴

Most of the recent plantations have been funded by IFIs - ADB and World Bank in particular. The IFIs have not only provided project loans in the forestry sector, they have also deployed companies of their choice and bought expatriate consultants from the conception stage of projects to their completion stage. After decades of plantation in recent history, these have caused irrecoverable ruin to forests in the CHT.⁷⁵

- c) Tobacco Cultivation in CHT:** Tobacco cultivation is strictly prohibited in the CHT. Yet, tobacco companies are doing brisk business. The cultivation of tobacco not only poses a threat to public health, but also to the ecosystem of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Tobacco farming has been introduced by big business houses that have not only introduced the crop but also invested in the know-how and the dissemination of the package of practices that go with the crop. Besides this, they motivate the farmers openly by offering incentives in cash and kind to cultivate tobacco (see Box 8: *Tobacco cultivation poses threat to environment in CHT*).

The forest cover of CHT is also used to process the tobacco, and up to 70,000 metric tons of firewood is burnt in 2,000 tobacco processing kilns every year. While this is depleting the region's natural forests, it also leaves an impact on the soil fertility, especially because it is difficult to grow other crops on the same land used for tobacco cultivation.

According to sources in the Bangladesh government's Agriculture Extension Department, some 7,000 farmers are involved in tobacco farming in the CHT. Tobacco is grown in all the three regions of the CHT – Rangamati, Bandarban and Khagrachhari, where farmers are now hooked to the tobacco crop as consumers of the cigarette. One indication is that farmers are losing their interests in the agricultural crops of the region like paddy, banana, maize, sesame, cotton, potato, pumpkin and etc. Indeed, according to some media reports, the farmers defaulted on loans provided by tobacco companies and resultantly, stepped into tobacco cultivation.⁷⁶

- d) Brickfields in the CHT:** Brick kilns are notorious for the damage they cause to the environment and to public health. Apparently, there has been a gross violation of rules as only 14 brick manufacturers out of 57 in the CHT have the necessary clearance from the Department of Environment. Even the DoE Director has

⁷⁴ Adnan, Shapan & Dastidar, Ranajit. 2011. *Alienation of the Lands of Indigenous Peoples in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*, CHTC & IWGIA, Dhaka.

⁷⁵ Gain, Philip. 2011, *Land, Forests, and Adivasis of Bangladesh* in Gain, Philip (ed.) *Survival on the Fringe: Adivasis of Bangladesh*, SEHD, Dhaka.

⁷⁶ *An addiction to tobacco*, Feb 01, 2012. [Bijoy Basant Patro/ OneWorld South Asia :](http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/an-addiction-to-tobacco#.UKC64GfneSo) <http://southasia.oneworld.net/news/an-addiction-to-tobacco#.UKC64GfneSo>.

admitted that a number of brick kilns are being run illegally. The result is that the areas around the brick kilns are adversely affected in many ways. Around 100 brick kilns in Bandarban, Khagrachhari and Rangamati hill districts use 5.40 lakh tonnes of loamy soil every year, to the detriment of agricultural lands, hills, forest resources and environment. The research found that 52 brick kilns in Khagrachhari, 31 in Bandarban and 17 in Rangamati produce and refract about 18 crore pieces of bricks every year. In the process, topsoil of at least 270 hectares of crop land is destroyed every year. A recent research conducted by Bandarban Soil and Water Conservation Centre run by Bangladesh Soil Research Institute revealed the alarming information (see Box 9, *Brick kilns in CHT harming agricultural lands and denuding forests*). Agricultural production has declined; the groundwater level has fallen and people living very close to the brick fields are suffering from respiratory diseases. Furthermore, forests in the area are dwindling as the brick kilns are burning a huge amount of wood.⁷⁷

Box 9: Brick Kilns in CHT harming agricultural lands and denuding forests

Around 100 brick kilns in Bandarban, Khagrachhari and Rangamati hill districts use 5.40 lakh tonnes of loamy soil every year, much to the harm of agricultural lands in addition to causing damage to hills, forest resources and environment. A recent research conducted by Bandarban Soil and Water Conservation Centre run by Bangladesh Soil Research Institute revealed this alarming information.

The research found that 52 brick kilns in Khagrachhari, 31 in Bandarban and 17 in Rangamati produce and refract about 18 crore pieces of bricks every year. In the process, topsoil of at least 270 hectares of crop land is destroyed every year. "Brick kilns have to use loamy soil to maintain quality of bricks. If the process continues 74,903 hectares of crop land in Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachhari will be destroyed soon," said agriculturist Jobaer Al Arman, officer-in-charge of Bandarban Soil and Water Conservation Centre. "Crop lands throughout the country are facing threat as setting up of brick kilns continue. Existing law has a provision for jail term of different tenure and monetary fine for using firewood for burning bricks. But there is no law to take action against the use of soil from agricultural land for the purpose," said agriculturist AKM Farhad Hossain, deputy director of the Department of Agricultural Extension at Bandarban. "According to the latest account, there are 34,114 hectares of sloppy crop lands in Khagrachhari, 22,443 hectares in Bandarban and 18,346 hectares in Rangamati district. The brick kilns now threaten these lands," noted soil researcher Mohammad Shahin said.

A medium sized brick kiln produces about 18 lakh pieces of brick every year and at least 3 kg earth is required for a piece of 150 cubic inch brick, said a brick field manager seeking anonymity. Brick field owners buy earth from nearby crop lands at nominal prices and earth is taken from up to six inches deep to make pulp for brick, he said. Environmentalists alleged that the brick field owners do not need to take any permission from local administration, agricultural department or Directorate of Environment for extracting soil. As per conditions for setting up a brick field, all bricks and other properties of a brick field can be seized if proof of burning firewood is found. Review of the office records and spot visits however show that

⁷⁷ The Daily Sun, 28 December 2010. http://www.daily-sun.com/details_yes_28-12-2010_quote-of-the-day_80_2_5_1_3.html.

no brick was seized for such crime in Bandarban district in last 28 years.

It was found during spot visits that 84 of the 100 brick fields in three hill districts have been set up very close to human habitations, educational institutions or health care facilities violating laws concerned. The brick field authorities got approval for mysterious reasons although the committee concerned comprised members of district administration, forest or environment directorate and Upazila Nirbahi Officer, said sources concerned. In Bandarban Sadar upazila, eight brick fields have been set up adjacent to densely populated areas near Dhopchhari Reserve Forest, one near a primary school and another within a few yards of a health centre. When contacted, DFO RASM Monirul Islam of Bandarban Forest Department said, "Rules have been relaxed considering requirement of bricks for development work as there was no scope for setting up brick field in the district Sadar except at Majherpara. "The district administration has been keeping an eye on the presence of 'too many' brick fields in the district. Four out of five applications for setting up brick fields have been rejected in the current season. Similar steps would also be taken in case of the remaining applications," Bandarban Additional Deputy Commissioner Abdul Mannan said.

Source: *TheDailyStar.net*, <http://www.blogs.com.bd/2009/12/100-brick-kilns-in-cht-harming-agri-lands-denuding-forests>.

The outcomes of these processes have led to resource depletion in many forms. The impact of soil erosion and declining soil fertility has been manifested in the declining yield, acreage and output of *jum* and plough cultivation, as well as fruit gardens and orchards. These varied resource depleting processes have progressively reduced the traditional livelihood options of the people of CHT, which compelled them to sell goods, seek wage employment and pursue other market based avenues of survival; all these factors contributed to increased poverty among the Hill people.⁷⁸

⁷⁸ Adnan, Shapan. 2004. *Migration, Land Alienation and Ethnic Conflict, Causes of Poverty in the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh*. Research & Advisory Services, Dhaka.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

It will be a destructive initiative to rehabilitate climate-displaced people from the plain lands to the CHT both for the ecology and for the indigenous people of CHT.

The CHT is one of the most disadvantaged and vulnerable regions in the country in terms of almost all major development indicators, including income, employment, poverty, health, water, environment and sanitation, education, women's employment, access to infrastructure and national building institutions, peace and inter-community confidence.

The geo-political situation of the CHT makes the area vulnerable, as it shares a border with Myanmar and with India.

The 1997 Peace Accord made the following modifications to land law in the CHT, under Clause 26, section B:

By amendment of section 64 the following sub-sections shall be made—

- a) Notwithstanding anything contained in any law for the time-being in force, no land within the boundaries of Hill District shall be given in settlement, purchased, sold and transferred including giving lease without prior approval of the Council: provided that this provision shall not be applicable in case of areas within the reserved forests, Kaptai Hydro-electricity Project, Betbunia Earth Satellite Station, State-owned industries and factories and lands recorded in the name of government.*
- b) Notwithstanding anything contained in any law for the time-being in force, no lands, hills and forests within the boundaries of the Hill District shall be acquired and transferred by the government without consultation and consent of the Hill District Council.*

This amendment of law indirectly prevents outsiders from acquiring land in the CHT region.

Although there is a myth that vast tracts of land in the CHT are lying empty, in reality, there is limited cultivatable land in the CHT. Even as early as 1918, when the population of the CHT was only 200,000, it was found necessary to restrict the migration of people from the plain lands to the CHT. The Kaptai Dam, which submerged 40% of the CHT's prime cultivable land, aggravated the situation and sowed the seeds of conflict in the area.

The insurgency and counter insurgency changed the socio-cultural landscape of the region; thousands of people were killed, lost their homesteads, and became displaced. Though there was agreement between the parties, it was not implemented. The Pahari people split among themselves, which further aggravated the situation and the majority community and army took advantage of this situation. The refugees and displaced people were never provided with adequate rehabilitation.

The land grabbing, mono-culture and industrial plantations have led to the CHT becoming deforested and deserted. In addition, tobacco cultivation and the creation of brickfields for development work have threatened the ecology and biodiversity of the CHT.

The Government policy of Bengali settlement has far reaching consequences for the land and indigenous peoples of the CHT. The land in the CHT simply cannot sustain the population that it now has. Both ethnocide and ecocide are evident because of the demographic imbalance and the land use policies of the government.