



**Institute of Social Studies**

**GRADUATE SCHOOL OF DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

**Whose Benefit?  
Role of Eco Park as Policy Instrument in Ensuring Sustainable Forest  
Management in Bangladesh**

*A research paper presented by*

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*(Bangladesh)*

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Obtaining the Degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS IN DEVELOPMENT STUDIES**

*Specialisation :*

**LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEVELOPMENT**

**Members of the Examining Committee**

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**The Hague, December 2005**

**This document represents part of the author's study programme while at the Institute of Social Studies; the views stated therein are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Institute.**

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**WHOES BENEFIT?**

***Role of Eco Park Projects as Policy Instrument in Ensuring Sustainable Forest  
Management in Bangladesh***

## **Dedication**

This paper is dedicated to my family

My Mother	<i>Sultana Shamsher</i>
My Father	<i>Shamsher Ahmed</i>
My Brother	<i>Faheem Shamsher Anik</i>
My Little Angel	<i>Adrita Shamsher Prova</i>

I Love you a lot

*I am proud to have this supportive and fulfilled family*

## Acknowledgement

This paper is the reflection of a long 15 months journey in Institute of Social Studies (ISS) where I became intellectually more matured, professionally more developed and personally more confident. It was not been possible to achieve the honour of completing this paper without the support and guidance of certain people throughout the year. I wish to sincerely acknowledge my supervisor, Dr. Joao Guimaraes, and my second reader Dr. Nicholas Awortwi, in this regard, for their cooperation, intellectual insights, critical comments and giving me the right direction to complete my paper during my research period.

It is my greatest pleasure to express my gratitude to the Netherlands Fellowship Program (NFP) who provided me the scholarship, without which I could not even think of coming here in Netherlands. My sincere appreciation is for all the professional and academic staffs of ISS who made my stay very enjoyable and secured here. In this regards my special thanks to Cisca Vorselman

My special thanks to Malene Buchy, Peter Bardole, Mustafa Kamal, Banik Bijoy Krishna and Manashi Bhattacharya for their thoughtful suggestions and comments on my paper. I am also very grateful to my interviewees, Mr. Iklil Mondol, Mr. Md. Habibur Rahman Khan, Md. Haroon-or-Rashid, Mr. Sanjeeb Dhrong, Dr. Philip Gain and Mr. Shahrier Khan for their time and valuable inputs on the issue related to my research.

I am highly indebted to Md. Masum Billah who was always there beside me, some buttons away, whenever I needed for any technical, moral and academic support and my heartiest gratitude goes to him for helping me in preparing the maps for my paper. I am truly grateful to Md. Riaz Uddin for giving me support in the proposal and design stage of my paper. I will always be obliged to Mr. Shahrier Khan, without his comment and help I could not be able to make the interviews possible and he was the first one to look at my draft paper for a quick editing. In this regard, I should always be thankful to my friend Tasmiah Mesbah as well.

My acknowledgment will be incomplete without thanking my LRD class 2004/2005 for contributing in my study and survival here at ISS. I will always remember the help of my fellow Bangladeshi participants of old batch for sharing their ideas in the time of selecting my research topic and of the new batch for their caring, respect and assistance towards me. My special appreciation is for Wasima who dealt with all my complains and frustrations very admirably and care for me when I was feeling unwell physically during my stay here. I would love to thank my friends Anissa, Tutik, Hien, Ha Phuong, Deden, Wang Zhuoyu (Joy) and Anne for always being there for me, when I felt lack of confidence in me and missing my family very much.

Last but not the least, I express my heartiest gratefulness and endless indebtedness to my whole family- my parents, my brother and my little sister. The heroic work of my father should rightfully be recognised here. He played the multi-dimensional role as my guardian, as a friend, and as my research associate simultaneously, whenever needed. My family never failed to give me the feelings that they are always there for me in every moment of my ISS life. It would have been next to impossible to undertake such a challenging job without their motivation, belief and moral support.

Finally, all my praise belongs to Almighty Allah, the most merciful. I convey my gratefulness to Him for giving me the ability to complete the study.

## Abstract

This paper brings out the effects of eco park projects on the lives of tribal people and its sustainability with the help of some indicators such as the tribal people's access to their traditional or alternative livelihood; access to participation in decision making process; access to forest lands and resource use; and access to cultural and religious practices. Secondary materials have been used to analyse the available information. Other than this, a brief interview was employed with some related people to have hands on idea on the eco park issue from both the government and the people's perspective.

The analysis shows that the tribal people are not accepting the eco park projects with its current implementation process, which is only to promote eco tourism as its core agenda. They are considering it as a tool to devastate the nature and disturb their traditional lifestyle. On the other hand, Government has a different view regarding the issue whereby it assures the alternative livelihood strategies for the tribal people as well as respect for their traditional cultural and religious practices and moreover, has promised to have no negative impact on the environment. This study concludes that the eco park project can bring sustainable forest management only if the authority involves tribal people in the planning and management stage in true sense and also respect their norms and values. Other than this, the government should also give them alternative livelihood strategies for survival and facilitate them to compete in the newly created job market in this sector.

## WHOES BENEFIT?

### *Role of Eco Park Projects as Policy Instrument in Ensuring Sustainable Forest Management in Bangladesh*

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### *Abbreviations Used In This Paper*

ADB	Asian Development Bank
BELA	Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association
BFIP	Bangladesh Forum for Indigenous People
BLA	Bangladesh Landless Association
CHT	Chittagong Hill Tracts
CPD	Centre for Policy Dialogue
DFID	UK Department for International Development
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations
FMP	Forest Master Plan
FMP	Forestry Master Plan
GoB	The Government of Bangladesh
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IUCN	The World Conservation Union
LGRD	Local Government Rural Development
MoEF	Ministry of Environment and Forest
OHCHR	Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights
RBA	Right Based Approach
SD	Sustainable Development
SEHD	Society for Environment and Human Development
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNEP	United Nations Environment Programme
WFT	Wildlife Fund Thailand
WRI	World Resources Institute
WWF	World Wide Fund for Nature

## **Glossary**

**Tribal People:** This term is not politically correct in the recent years. But for the convenience of this paper the author has respectfully used the term tribal people to represent the ethnic minority group of Bangladesh. This term can also be referred as "Indigenous people" according to the definition of Asian Development Bank. The Bank defines "indigenous peoples" as groups with social or cultural identities distinct from that of the dominant or mainstream society. "Indigenous peoples" is a generic concept that includes cultural minorities, ethnic minorities, indigenous cultural communities, **tribal people**, natives, and aboriginals.

**Jum Cultivation:** **Jhum** or slash and burn technology of agriculture practiced mainly by the people of pre-plough age. Most tribal people of Bangladesh are well acquainted with this type of farming. This can also be termed as 'Shifting Cultivation' which forms an integral part of their socio-economical and cultural life. In this cultivation system, seeds are sown after the first rain in April. Small holes are made throughout the field and a mixture of different crop seeds are placed in them. The main crops generally grown in jhum include rice, maize, millet, sesame, cucumber, pumpkin, melon, stringbean, cotton, banana, ginger, turmeric, etc.

**Khash Land:** In Bangladesh context, Khash land is the land which is owned by the government under the possession of Deputy Commissioner (Administrative Head of the District). He has the full authority to take any decision on how these lands should be used for public benefit.

**Note about the official Definition of Eco Park:** It is a requirement from the planning commission for the proposal to include a clear definition while submitting the project for approval. The definition of Eco Park, placed in Chapter 3, is taken from a project proposal, thus this is considered as an official definition.

**UNO** or Union Nirbahi Officer is the Administrative Head of the Sub-District in Bangladesh.

**Panpunji:** in Bangladesh, the Khashia Tribe, living in the hill forest area of Sylhet district, are dependent on growing Pan or Betel leaf which is their main crop. They call their village "Punji". This means a cluster of houses. The *Panpunji* means the cluster of pan or betel leaf growing area or pan garden (known as pan Borouj),

**Taka:** unit of Bangladeshi Currency, where 1 US dollar = 65.775 Taka (conversion rate is taken on 21 November 2005 from <<http://www.xe.com/ucc/convert.cgi>>)

**Shaheed Miner:** This is a famous and tribute monument of Bangladesh which was built in memory of the mother language martyrs. Most of the serious processions and protest, especially for the issues related to the violation of human rights, against the government take place in this monument area to build awareness and to seek justice publicly.

## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Initiation of A Big Debate on Eco Park issue in Bangladesh ...

In January 17, 2001, the Prime Minister of Bangladesh inaugurated a 'Botanical Garden and Eco-park' at Sitakunda, ensuring that "This eco-park will not only preserve biodiversity and different species of wildlife, but also make arrangements for eco-friendly tourism." She also added that the project would increase employment opportunities among the local people (UNB, 2001). This Sitakunda Eco Park project, set up in 1996, was the first of its kind in Bangladesh. Notably, The Government of Bangladesh (GoB) has initiated and designed the Eco Park projects as "policy instrument" (Barde, 1995) for achieving the national forest policy goal, which simultaneously aimed at preserving environment and fostering economic development (Editorial, 2005) of the country. According to Banglapedia (2004),

*"Eco Park is a recreational park established in any natural habitat that does not disturb or affect the biodiversity of the area. The objective of establishment of an Eco Park is for the recreation of visiting people from home and abroad, as well as creating a centre for the dissemination of knowledge to people of all age groups about the habits and habitats of the plant and animal populations living there, and at the same time creating awareness about the need of conservation of biodiversity."*

Later, in the same year the statement "Bangladesh Eco Parks are bad news for minority peoples" from Democratic Worker's Party (April 2001) has given rise to a big debate as the implementation process of these projects neither includes nor respect human needs, values and rights in reality. The current study is an attempt to highlight and compare major issues of this debate and uncertainties from the Sustainable Development (SD) perspective. This paper emphasises the importance of social issues and concerns along with the environmental impact to ensure SD. The main argument of this paper is, *Government has undertaken Eco Park Projects to bring socio-economic benefit for the local people, but in practice, it is creating conflict of interest between local people and the authority. Thus, with the current objectives and implementation process, Eco Parks can not be a good policy instrument for ensuring sustainable forest management in Bangladesh.*

## 1.2 Background of the Study

No exact and recent official information is available on the forest coverage in Bangladesh. According to Bangladesh Forest Department Website, Bangladesh has 2.52 million hectares of natural forest, of which 1.52 million hectares is managed by the Forest Department that accounts for 10.3 percent of the total land area in Bangladesh which is also similar to the estimation given by Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO) (UN, 2005). On the other hand, according to the World Resource Institute (WRI) website, the total forest land area of Bangladesh, in 2000 is 9 percent of total land area of the country (WRI, 2005). Notably, per capita forest land in the country is less than 0.22 hectares which is considered to be the lowest in the world (Gain, 1998). However, in any case Bangladesh has very small area with natural forest compare to some of the other South Asian countries<sup>1</sup> and with this small forest coverage it is very difficult to maintain the ecological balance and to ensure sustainable environment for the next generation.

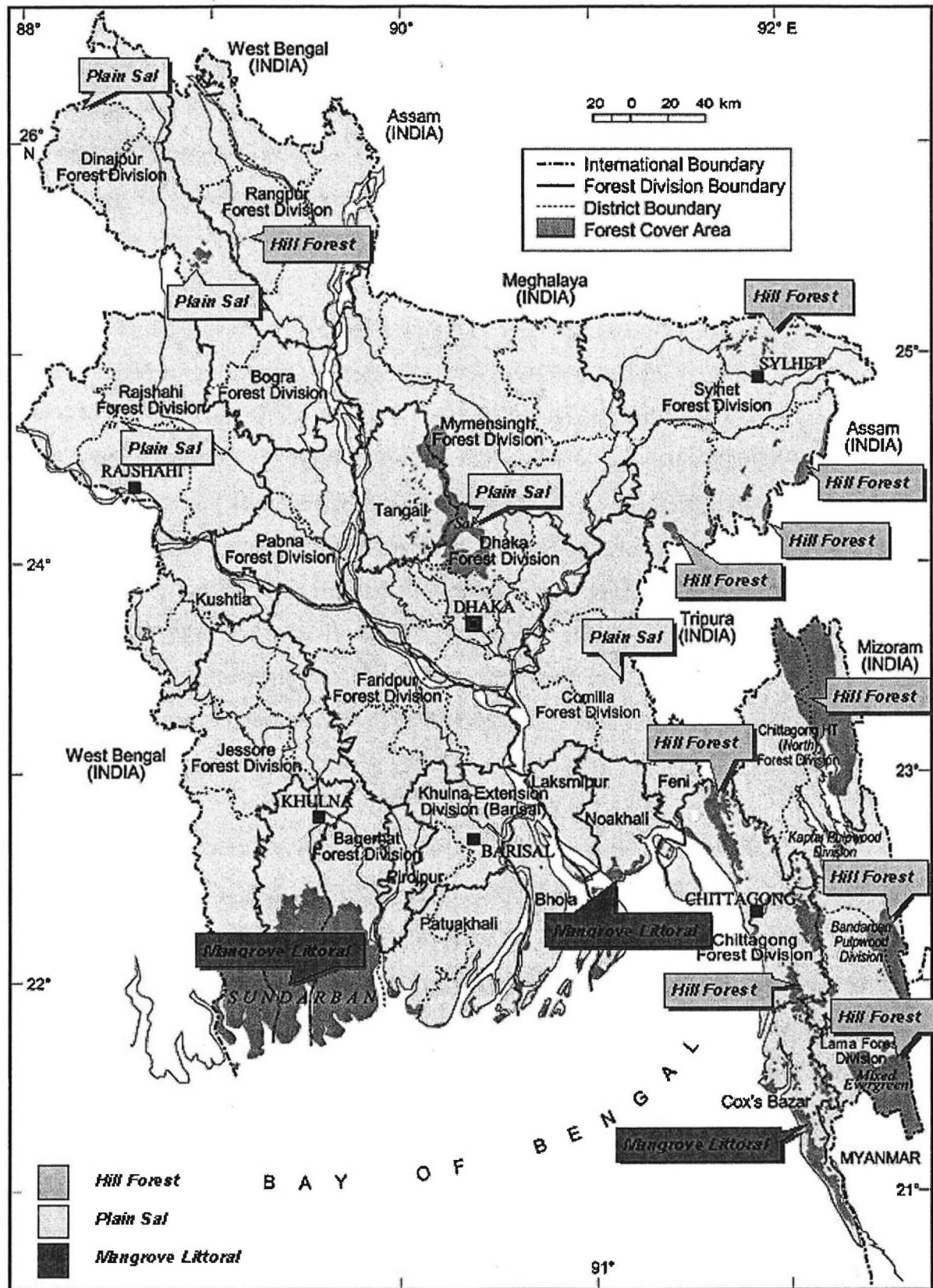
Based on the tropical monsoon climate and the topography of the country, the forest area has been divided into three categories which are Hill Forests, Plain Sal Forests and Mangrove Littoral forests (Map-1). Currently, the forest areas are degrading and decreasing at an alarming rate due to overexploitation as well as lack of proper planning and management. In this context, the poor and local people are always blamed for destroying the forest (ibid).

In the Hill area of the country, especially in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), the tribal people practice the *Jum* cultivation in the hill forest area around them. This cultivation system is largely blamed for the massive deforestation. Furthermore, the current Forest Master Plan (FMP) of the country, prepared to guide the forest policy and the forest management process, also states that due to the increasing demand and over-exploitation of cultivable land, fuel wood and other forest products, with economic value, the carrying capacity of the forest has been exceeded by far. Additionally, population pressure is directly contributing to the encroachment of forest land, uncontrolled logging, illegal felling by the local people and changes in land use patterns (Gain, 1998; Haque, 1998). However, some corrupt and negligent forest

---

<sup>1</sup> According to FAO estimation in 2000, Bhutan has 64.2%, India has 21.6%, Nepal has 27.3% and SriLanka has 30% of Forest land area compare to the total land area of the respective countries (UN, 2005).

Map 1: Forest Coverage of Bangladesh



Source: Prepared by Md. Masum Billah based on the information of Banglapedia (2004), forest and forestry page

department staffs, illegal traders, local influential leaders, some other government officials concerned, one group of police men as well as journalists are also major but anonymous actors of forest resource depletion and deforestation (Haque, 1998) in Bangladesh. An unpublished study of Timm (undated in Gain, 1998:35) on forest land of Chittagong discovered that “the loss has been attributed to commercial exploitation of immature trees for sale in the black markets *with blessings of the Forest Department*”.

Moreover, some commercial forestry programmes and projects like the Government funded Rubber Plantation Project and Teak Plantation Project in CHT, Asian Development Bank (ADB)-funded Commercial Fuel-wood Plantation, United States Aid (USAID) funded Kaptai Hidro Power project always affected the local tribal people of the area and pushed them to go deeper into the forest for survival. Consequently, the rate of deforestation has increased and the Environmental balance of the forest area has decreased sharply. For example, the Rubber plantation were mono-cultural and stop regeneration of new forest whereas Sal forest was unique in retaining biological diversity; the teak forests of CHT are being criticised because nothing grows under the teak trees and in the rainy season this causes a massive top soil erosion; the main criticism for the ADB funded wood lot plantation is that it is jeopardising the livelihood of the tribal communities living in the Madhupur Forest (Gain, 1998). Thus deforestation is causing serious problem towards a balanced ecosystem as well as loss of bio-diversity of the country which is finally leading to a declining economic condition (Haque, 1998:4) as well as an unsustainable development (FMP, 1994; Gain, 1998).

Apart from recovering the national forest, the government has the major responsibility to protect remaining natural forests and wildlife of the country (Gain, 1998). In this context, Bangladesh reformed its forest management document in 1993 (MoEF, undated-a) which is guided by FMP. Additionally, the formulation of National Forest Policy 1994 was also initiated from the FMP (Mustafa, 2002). It is interesting to note that the objective of present forest management is not only limited to revenue collection but also extend to enhancing bio-diversity and eco-tourism (MoEF, undated-a). To achieve this goal the government has identified protected areas as conservation sites and initiated some Eco Park projects in those areas.



### 1.3 Indication of Problem

The concept of Eco Park is a new one for Bangladesh. It designed to bring benefit both in environmental conservation and economic growth for local people in a sustainable manner, by promoting eco-tourism (Mortoza, 2004). Most of the Eco Park sites are chosen from the forest and coastal lands of the country based on the richness of their scenic beauty, bio-diversity, flora and fauna and a large number of tribal people inhabit in those areas for generations in Bangladesh. Among 1.2 million tribal people of Bangladesh (BBS, 1994), 0.8 million live in rural settings (Virtual Bangladesh, 2005) and almost all of them are depending on forest based agriculture (Khaleque, 1998). According to their view, along with professionals from every corner of the country, GoB do not take their livelihoods and rights into account while undertaking any development project to achieve the broader goal of environmental protection and/or reducing poverty. As mentioned earlier, some so called 'development projects' devastate local people's socio-cultural and economic lives (Gain, 1998; Alam, 2004) in the past. On top of that, again, the Eco Park projects are designed as a forest management tool to promote sustainable development without any consultation with the tribal people who have been residing there for generations (Mortoza 2004; The Daily Star, 2003; Hotline Asia, 2003). Their livelihoods depend on the forest and forest resources around them as they are still practicing the traditional way of crop cultivation (rice, betel nut, betel leaf, pineapple) (Gain, 1998; Mehdy, 2005).

The Democratic Workers Party (2001) states that “..The latest policy of establishing *eco-parks* must be condemned. It flies in the face of the most basic tenets of human rights, ecological protection and sustainable development. The already marginalised inhabitants of the land earmarked for *development* and *preservation* will bear the cost of this pointless exercise and their lives and livelihood are considered expendable”. In line with this, the tribal people are having doubt and feeling uncertain about the sustainability of the projects. This study tried to find out whether the Eco Park projects are properly addressing the issues of environment (bio-diversity) conservation and socio-economic development of local people, important for ensuring sustainable forest management in Bangladesh.

#### **1.4 Research Objectives**

The main objective of this study is to analyse the role of Eco Park projects as a policy instrument aimed at bringing sustainable development in Bangladesh. Some supporting objectives have also been considered to get the clear picture of the argument. They are:

- To assess and compare the objectives of Eco Park project with what is happening in practice as a policy instrument
- To analyse how the Eco Park projects are affecting local people's right and ensuring sustainable development

#### **1.5 Research Questions:**

To achieve these objectives, the research is trying to answer the following central question:

***To What Extent Are The Eco Park Projects Ensuring Sustainable Forest Management In Bangladesh?***

To answer the main research question the supporting sub-questions are:

- What are the views of Bangladesh government on the Eco Park projects as a policy instrument?
- What are the bases of the livelihoods, socio-cultural and religious practices of the tribal people in the Project Areas?
- How will livelihoods, socio-cultural and religious practices be influenced by the projects?
- To what extent do the projects infringe upon the tribal people's rights?
- What are the views of the People about the Eco Park projects which are affecting them?

#### **1.6 Relevance and Justification:**

Generally government has the responsibility to undertake any development projects for the benefit of people according to their needs (FAO, 1984) for the economic development of the country. The existence of interaction between human beings and nature needs to be taken into account while planning for these types of projects. If not, then a project may negatively effect the achievement of the main policy goals. In the forest policy it is clearly stated that there should be local people's participation and



inclusion at the time of any decision which could affect them. In contrast, many newspaper reports and articles, nationally published between 2001 and 2005, showed that the Eco Park projects are increasing vulnerability and uncertainty among the tribal people through incidents like displacement, violation of rights, loss of livelihood, and disruptions of cultural practices which cannot ensure sustainable development.

By analysing all the recent debates on this issue, this paper gives the answer whether the Eco Park is a good policy instrument or not to achieve the broader forest policy goal of ensuring sustainable development. It is necessary to see the debate from both points of view. The research looks at the tension and conflict that aroused between the main stakeholders, like the government, the executive agency of the project, and the tribal people, due to implementation of Eco Park projects. This study is particularly important to find out the reason behind this debate which can later be used as a recommendation for incorporating views of major stakeholders, in designing such projects, to ensure sustainable forest management

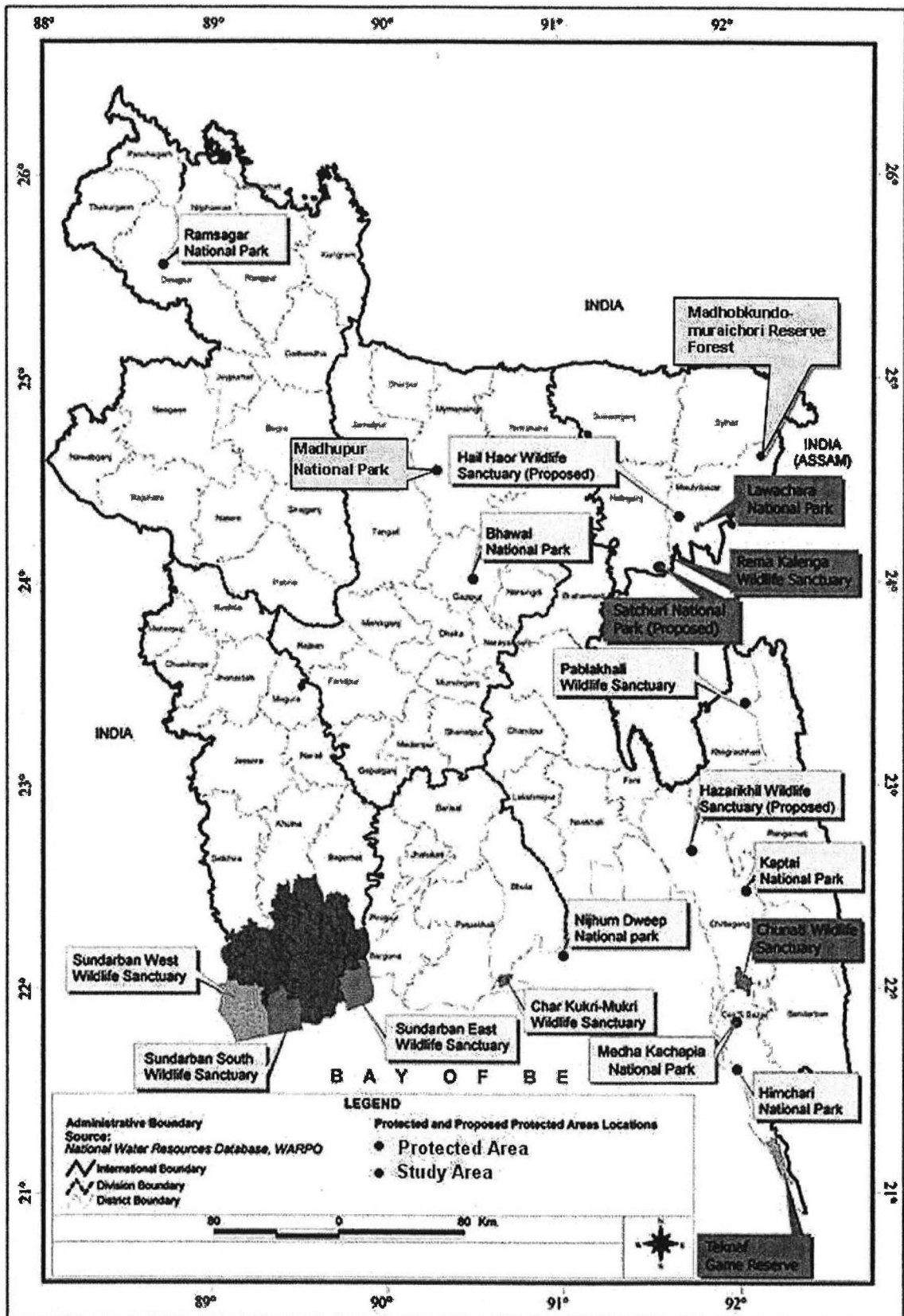
The research opens up scope for further study on the impact and/or validity of these types of projects in the densely populated country like Bangladesh from social, environmental, economic and/or political perspective. Finally, this paper may contribute in correcting the policy decisions of building Eco Parks in this densely populated country.

## **1.7 Methodology**

### ***1.7.1 Data Analysis***

This research has been done with a qualitative analysis mainly based on the secondary materials. After reviewing the related concepts and approaches, some principles are identified to use as indicators for analysing the argument of the case. To explain the situation in practice, two Eco Park projects: *Madhupur National Park Project* and *Madhobkundo-Muraichora Eco Park Projects*, have been described as case studies (Map 2), which are already being implemented.

Map-2: Protected Areas of Bangladesh: Identifying the Case Study Areas



Source: Prepared by Md. Masum Billah based on the Map provided by Forest Department of Bangladesh

### ***1.7.2 Sources of Data***

#### Secondary source of information

An extensive library research has been done to get the information for analysing. The secondary sources used are:

- The forest policy of Bangladesh, and the official forest management document
- The documents related to the national laws and rights of the citizen of Bangladesh.
- Project proposals related to building Eco Park projects in Bangladesh.
- Books, journals, newspaper articles, websites related to the issues of Eco Park, conservation and tribal people.

#### Primary source of information

Additionally, 6 people from Bangladesh have been interviewed through electronic mail with a pre-set questionnaire (questionnaire and designation of interviewees are placed in Annex A). To avoid bias in the analysis, three persons are selected from the government sector and the remaining three are from the non governmental sector. The interviewees have been chosen based on their availability and interest to answer the questions.

### **1.8 Scope and Limitations of the Study**

The issue can be looked at from a political, pure economical or environmental viewpoint, but these are outside the terms of reference of this research. As the writing progressed, many other important questions arose, like To what extent is it possible to maintain the traditional way of life for the tribal people in this globalised era? Or, To what extent do tribal people receive proper education opportunities to compete in the formal job markets or what percentage of the tribal people are really depend on forest resources for their livelihood and what are the other livelihood practices in the field? These questions are just bypassed and kept for further research.

The major reason to keep this narrow focus is availability of relevant data. Other than interview, a primary/field survey, including cost-benefit analysis, could be a very useful tool to provide the strong evidence for the argument. Even for the interviews, it was very difficult to receive the answers from the government officials. Finally, due

to financial constraint it is not possible to go to the study area to do the survey or to cross check the available information within this limited time.

### **1.9 Organisation of the Paper**

This paper is organised into five chapters. This first chapter provides a brief introduction to the problem studied, Chapter 2 clarifies the approaches taken in this paper and reviews the underlying theoretical groundwork and assumptions. Some indicators have been derived after reviewing the relevant concepts and approaches and eventually used as a tool to analyse the case further. Chapter 3 focuses on analysing the forest policy and management system of Bangladesh and placed the official definitions of some key words like protected area, Eco Park, reserved forest etc.. It also analyses the Eco Park projects and their impacts from the government's point of view. Chapter 4 than explains about the effect of Eco Park projects from local people's view and it tries to bring up all the issues to answer the research questions. This chapter analyses two case studies to give the evidence for the main argument of the paper. Finally Chapter 5, the conclusion reflects on the concerns raised by the study offering the author's position on the main argument regarding the implementation of Eco Park Projects.

## 2. UNDERSTANDING THEORIES

*This chapter introduces the theoretical framework that guides the analysis of available information. The conceptual framework is presented with “sustainable development” as the central concept followed by the concept of conservation and importantly, the rights-based approach. After the review of the three theories, some criteria are derived to analyse the role of Eco Park as a policy instrument. An analytical framework is developed at the end of this chapter.*

### 2.1 Sustainable Development (SD)

‘Start from a sustainable development perspective, while recognising that environment, poverty and equality will affect future development paths and vice versa, with many complex and dynamic feedback mechanisms. Ideally poverty and environment should become a core part of the overall sustainable development strategy’ (Munasinghe, 2003). The concept of SD addresses the effect of human decisions on earth’s environment while conservation only focuses on preserving earth’s resources. It ensures the better quality of life for everybody at present generations and for generations to come (Leon, 2004). The most acceptable definition of SD, given in the Brundtland Commission, is: *Development is sustainable if the present generation meets its needs, without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs.* Here, the definition is talking about people’s basic needs in terms of social welfare levels and ability in terms of availability of natural resources (Pelt, 1993:2) for their daily consumption, for now and for the future.

However, SD incorporates development of environment, social and economic planning and management issues in the core of its concept (Barrow, 1997:8 and Leon, 2004). Barrow (1995) has illustrated the concept into diagrammatic format (fig-1) where the goals of biological or resource system are to keep genetic diversity and to maximise productivity; the goals of economic systems are to supply basic needs and to improve equity as well as to improve goods and service; in the third circle he talks about the social system where the objectives are to sustain institutions, to improve social justice and to improve participation. Additionally, the main challenge for SD is to find out a way forward where everybody will get the benefit of development and

nobody suffers from its side effects and a healthy environment will ensure better quality of life which will lead to long term economic growth (Leon, 2004).

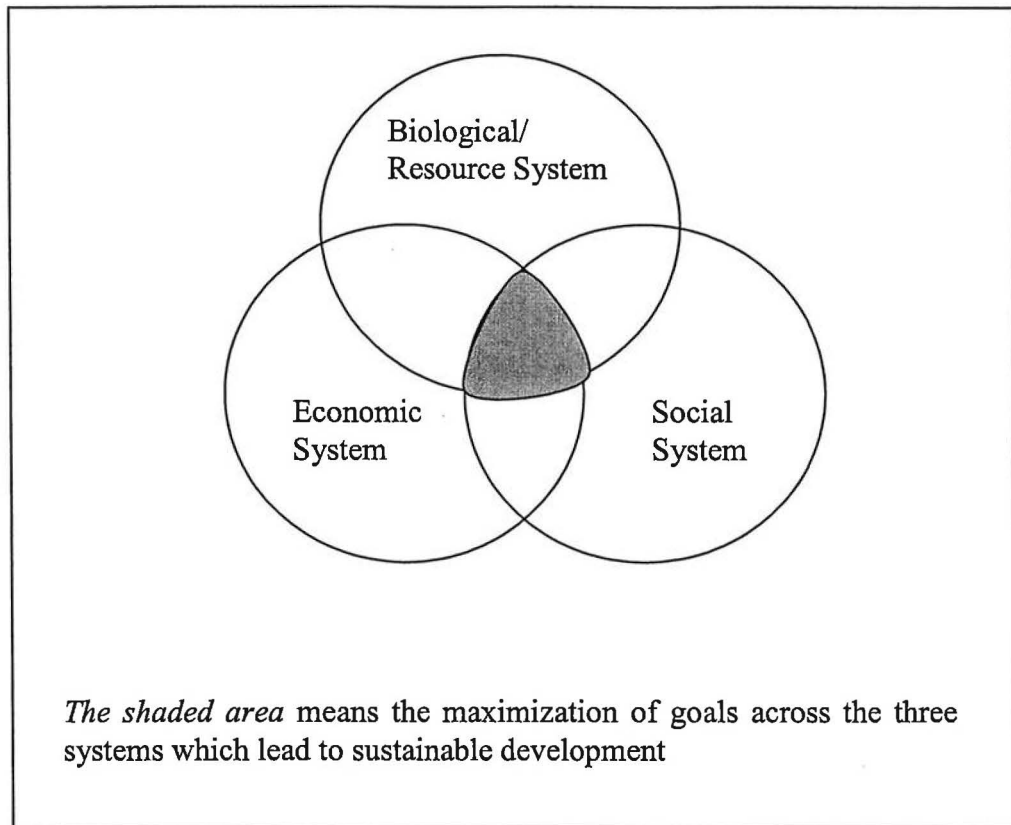


Fig 1: Sustainable development: A Diagrammatic Explanation of the Concept<sup>2</sup>

To ensure SD, there should be a balance in economic, social and biological system (Fig 1). The idea for fulfilling the needs of present generation and preserving resources for the future is making the concept more acceptable and adoptable as a key policy goal by many government, non-government and international organisations (Grainger, 2004:1). Moreover, in achieving this goal of SD, governments of many countries are trying to incorporate the concerns of SD into their countries' socio-economic policies (Pelt, 1993:2). Additionally, conservationists believe that protecting environment is the tool for securing natural resources for today's and future generations. But they are realising, as mentioned by Barrow (1995) (fig 1), that besides achieving the goal of conservation, the goal of other socio-economic development should also be recognised and should be addressed.

<sup>2</sup> Source: adapted from Barrow [(1995:67) in Barrow (1997:7)]

According to Grainger (2004:3), SD was devised to overcome contradiction between two fundamental concepts, one of which was to pursue the environment conservation and another is to search for economic growth and development. These two concerns have given rise to two conflicting (reformists/ techno-centric and radical/ eco -centric) ideals of sustainable development though, O' Riordan (1981) stated that there are no clear distinctions in those two schools rather certain elements from both thoughts can be accepted depending on the economic status and institutional setting of a country. In this context, Poore and Sayer (1987) identified some elements specifically for sustainable development of the forestry sector. The elements are: maintaining the harvest of all forest products as sustainable level; maintaining essential ecosystem processes; maintaining biological diversity at ecosystem, species and gene levels; ensuring economic sustainability and most importantly satisfying the needs of people living in and around the forest.

Notably, the political leaders have currently recognised that sustainable forest management is part of sustainable development of forestry sector (USDA- Forest Service, 1995a). Moreover, according to the economic literature, Sustainable forest management is considered as a subset of sustainable development (USDA-Forest Service, 1995b). Sergeant and Bass (1992) explained that for ensuring sustainable development of forestry sector, the relationships between financial, social and ecological values of forests should be complementary to each other. Incorporating traditional knowledge in forest conversion can bring social sustainability. They emphasised on establishing the right policy framework for sustainable forest management. The policy framework should recognise the ecological and social realities, set up a clear forest ownership structure and the policy should be formulated with much greater public participation and incorporating traditional knowledge to ensure sustainable development for the forestry sector.

## **2.2 Concept of Conservation**

In the time of British Empire, the concept of Conservation started spreading its roots in the colonial world and flourished widely throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Conservation became a global concern to growing environmental movement (Adams and Mulligan, 2003:1). The concept can be distinguished into two broad categories, the first one aims at rehabilitating or improving the environmental resources in or adjacent to



settlement areas towards upgrading the living conditions of people. Soil conservation, water retention aforestation, agro-forestry and regeneration of forests and grasslands are some of the initiatives includes in this category. The second category specified the programs that aim at biodiversity protection or scientific research, particularly, in forests and water bodies with a combination of promoting recreation and tourism development. National parks, game reserves, biosphere reserves, wildlife sanctuaries etc are some of the examples of this category which are also referred to as 'protected areas' (Ghimire and Pimbert, ed. 1997).

It has been widely discussed that the ideas and techniques of protecting areas for conservation, at the present time, is adopted from the western models of creating national parks which increasingly focuses on ensuring modern standard of living for the elite group of people, living in the developed countries and looking for amenity and aesthetic aspect of nature (Hays, 1982:21). From the The World Conservation Union (IUCN) categorisation of protected area, category II is talking about the national parks which are protected and managed mainly for ecosystem or biodiversity conservation and recreational purpose. Areas, managed for conserving wildlife falls under Category IV and Category V includes the areas managed for landscape conservation and recreation (McNeely, 1993; IUCN, 1994).

It has been said that protected areas are essential to conserve the biological diversity (WRI, IUCN, UNEP, 1992) as well as to bring numerous benefits for the people living in and around the protected areas (Dixon and Shermann, 1990; McNeely and Miller, 1984). On the contrary, the conservationists realised very recently that there is a negative impact on the inhabitants if the area is preserved as national park (Colchester, 1997).

Historically, there is evidence that most of the national parks or protected areas exclude local people living in those areas and were built without their consultation (Krishna and Ghimire, 1997). These local peoples are often displaced or have their access restricted to the natural resources of those areas where they, directly or indirectly, depend for their livelihoods. They are managing their local natural resources in sustainable manner using their traditional knowledge and indigenous management system as well as protecting the balance of the ecosystems and cultural



landscapes around them (Oviedo and Brown, 1999). Therefore, it is very important to build a good relationship between human population and protected areas/national parks to pursue a successful conservation programme (Stolton and Dudley, 1999: 97). In addition to that the efficiency and sustainability of conservation program can be measured on the basis of its capacity to reduce poverty and promote sustainable environment rehabilitation of the area (Ghimire and Pimbert, 1997).

Furthermore, the idea of conservation is linked with sustainable development (SD) as it is being seen from the IUCN (Tisdell, 1991) explanation which defines conservation as the “management of human use of the biosphere so that it may yield the greatest sustainable benefit to present generations while maintaining its potential to meet the needs and aspirations of future generations”. Similarly, Redclift (1987) also argued that if the livelihoods of the poor people are given priority then the conservation of biodiversity and SD can be integrated in a true sense. But when the national parks are established for conservation it pushes the local residents towards relocation from their original lands which leads to social, political and environment problems including the disruption of traditional balance in human nature relationship (Colchester, 1987). Consequently, these local people suffer from restriction in the access to resources, violation of human rights and rights to use and manage their lands, disturbance in religious and cultural identities and the economic basis due to loss of behavioural patterns, institutions and symbols as well as their traditional economic practices (Colchester, 1994). Local people then became the poacher as well illegal in their own area overnight from hunters and protector of the environment and also are blamed for further degradation of environment (ibid).

On the other hand, most of the conservation programs are financed by the foreign donors where they try to incorporate their aims into the national policy goal (Blaikie, 1985) and ignore the needs of the local people which lead to concern of project sustainability. Thus, to integrate the need of local population in the conservation issue it is necessary to understand their rights and livelihood pattern from the SD perspective. If the resources are conserved and protected with the realisation that the increasing number of population can meet their needs and protect their rights from the existing resources and strategies which are available, accessible, adaptable and acceptable to them (Tomasevski, 2003), only then it could ensure the availability of

resources for future generation. According to Colchester (1997), the creation of protected areas may not be a suitable option for any densely populated countries where the legitimate rights to the ownership and control over natural resources of local tribal people are not recognised by the state.

### **2.3 Right Based Approach (RBA)**

The Copenhagen Declaration 1995 put the people in the centre of SD to link the human rights and development. In line with this, the right-based approach deals with people's economic, social and cultural rights for SD. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) (2000) workshop report on Human Rights and Sustainable Human Development stated that other than only defining and identifying the subject of development, human RBA translates people's needs into rights as well as integrate the values, standards and principles of the human rights system into the plans, policies and processes of development.

As such, the world development report of World Bank (2000) in line with The UK Department for International Development (DFID) (2000) argues that poor people have the right to expect their government to take the policy and programme which will increase economic opportunities and enhance security while addressing the issues of poverty and exclusion. On contrary, United Nations (UN) has mentioned that the programs and policies, identified and approved by the national level officials for national development, always ignore the free and meaningful participation of indigenous people. However, the objectives of those policies go against the views and interest of the local people. As a consequence, they have to face displacement, loss of livelihood, degradation of local environment, damage of religious and cultural sites and other socio-economic and environmental unsustainability. In this regards, the draft Declaration of United Nations on the rights of indigenous people's states in article 30, "indigenous peoples have the right to determine and develop priorities and strategies for the development or use of their lands, territories or other resources" (OHCHR, 2002). Similarly, it is also been said that the development projects create conflicts when they are been implemented without the consent and respect for the indigenous people's values, norms, religious believes and rights over their lands and local resources (ibid).

According to Tomasevski (2003), “no right could exist without corresponding government obligations”. The government of every country has this obligation to protect and respect the rights of all the citizens (McChesney, 2003, Amnesty International, 2005). In this context, it is most important to ensure that the local people get equitable benefit from the implementation of programs or projects which are undertaken to achieve the national policy goals in the territories of indigenous people and which can affect their economic and socio-cultural live. Their situation can be analysed on the basis of the following elements of OHCHR’s RBA:

*Participation:* the government should recognise the need for full, active and meaningful participation of indigenous people in the process of planning, implementation and evaluation of national policies, programs and projects which will directly affect their live and where they can contribute towards ensuring SD.

*Linkage to Development and Rights:* it is also very important that the policy, program or project is recognising their rights over the lands and resources around them as well as to respect their cultural and religious practices

*Empowerment:* it is very important to provide the indigenous people with power, capacities, capabilities and access needed to their own quality of live towards reducing poverty

*Equity:* it should be ensured that they get the equitable benefit from the economic activities which are affecting them in one way or other.

#### **2.4 Link between the Concepts**

As mentioned earlier, the Copenhagen declaration on Social Development (UN, 1995) has placed people at the centre of SD. From the above discussion, it can be summarized that when the areas specially the forest areas are being protected to conserve the biological diversity and ecological balance of nature in a country, most of the time the local people of those areas have to suffer most and they have to face the displacement, loss of economic opportunities, restricted access to use their ancestral land and resources.

Ghimire and Pimbert (1997), in their book on “social change and conservation” put up the concerns about the existence of national park projects or reserved areas which are promoting recreational facilities in one hand and restricting local people’s access on the other hand. They are clearly stating that it is impossible to ensure SD of environmental conservation as well as to protect people’s interest for their wellbeing. If such projects can be recognized people’s rights over using lands and resources, respect their values, norms and cultural practices and secure their livelihoods to improve quality of life, only then the local people can contribute in the project’s success towards ensuring SD.

### **2.5 The Lens: Basic Criteria for Assessing the Eco Park Projects**

After reviewing the basic concepts of SD, Conservation and RBA, following criteria have been identified and these indicators have been used in this paper to analyse the role of Eco Park projects in ensuring sustainable forest management.

- Access to livelihoods: The study analyses the state of tribal people’s livelihoods and how these are been affected with the implementation of Eco Park projects in Bangladesh, under this criterion. The paper also examines whether there are any alternative strategies or opportunities for these tribal groups or not as incentive to ensure the efficient management of parks.
- Access to Participation: It is very important aspect to look at tribal people’s participation level in the project design or implementation. Therefore, examining the involvement of the tribal people in managing these parks also gives an idea about the sustainability of the project
- Rights of Tribal people: Access and control over the lands and resources around them as well as access to their traditional practices of culture and religion are the basic rights of the local tribal people. This criterion looks at how the projects deal with these rights and what are the affect and reaction from tribal people regarding the continuation of these projects.

### **2.6 Analytical Framework:**

This paper answers the research questions (section 1.4) using the criteria identified in the previous section. The forest policy of Bangladesh has conserved some areas to

ensure SD of environment. Many projects have been undertaken at the micro level to achieve the national policy goal for conserving natural environment mentioned in the forest policy. On the other hand, the forest areas are not only protected for environmental reason but also to ensure the economic benefit by encouraging eco tourism in those areas. The eco park projects have been initiated to achieve these goals.

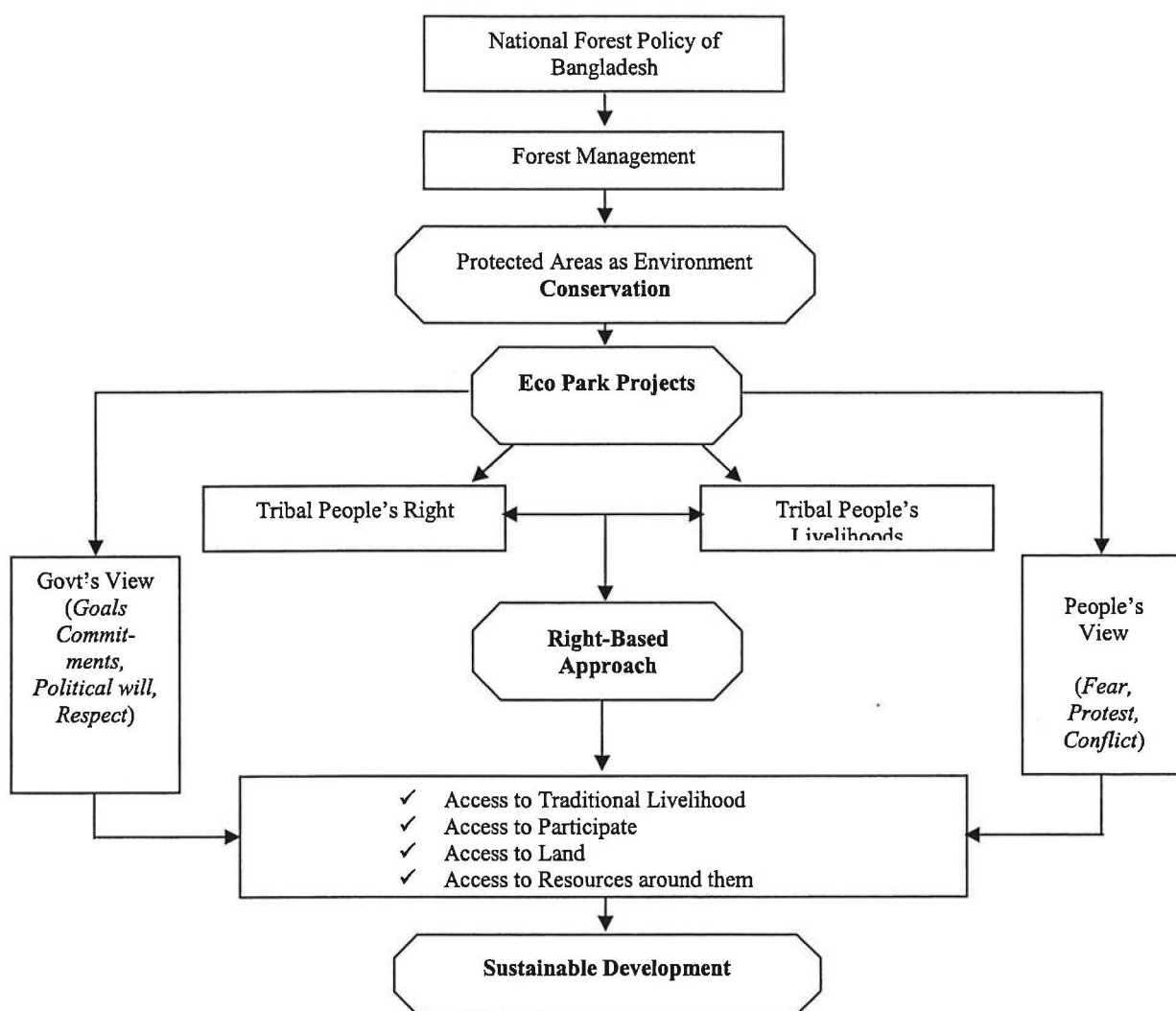


Fig 2: Analytical Framework

The framework (Fig 2) shows that if the people have the uncertainty and fear that after the implementation of the project they will never get the access to their usual livelihood, their lands and resources and they will not be able to practice their traditional culture and religion than people will not cooperate and the project cannot bring sustainable development. on the other hand, if the GoB is committed to people

as well as has the political will to incorporate people in the planning and implementation stage in true sense, respect tribal people's rights and traditional practices and finally provide them with acceptable economic opportunities than the tribal people will cooperate and the Eco Park will bring sustainable development and will be a good policy instrument.

### **3. FOREST POLICY, PLAN AND MANAGEMENT**

*This chapter analyses the forest policy and management of Bangladesh to give the base for Eco Park projects to be a policy instrument. The official definitions of Eco Park, protected areas and related key words are presented in this chapter. Moreover, the analysis of the information collected from three government officials is placed in the relevant sections to show the Government's view on the effect of Eco park projects on local people and environment to ensure the sustainable development. The chapter concludes with criticising the main policy approach of the projects.*

#### **3.1 Forest Policy of Bangladesh: A Changing Perspective**

The increasing population of the country is putting much pressure on the existing forest resources. The growing demand for cultivable land, wood and various forest products exceeds the carrying capacity of forests which leads to the destruction of ecosystems in most parts of Bangladesh (FMP, 1994). Marginalised and poor people, who are being pushed to live in vulnerable areas of the country, especially in the forest areas, are bound to use the natural resources around them for survival. The forest lands which they use for cultivation and other purposes have proven to be ecologically unsustainable (ibid) therefore, the local tribal people are always blamed for the depletion of forest areas. On the contrary, Khan (1998) has claimed that the deforestation in most of the government forest is occurring due to the insufficient 'bureaucratic custodian approach' towards a sustainable forest management. The Task Force, 1987 says that despite of the fact that the government has centralised the authority of using and managing the national forest resources as well as superseding the traditional rights and communal authority in Bangladesh (Mustafa, 2002), the forest sector has been ineffective in maintaining its contribution in the national economy.

Notably, The Bangladesh government has signed the earth summit 1992, held in Brazil, which has laid emphasis on the necessity for sustainable forest management including the forest conservation issues in all signatory countries (United Nations, May 1997). As stated earlier, to keep the pace with the global concerns of conserving natural forest, the government has introduced and reviewed its National Forest Policy in 1994 and initiated the Forest Master Plan which also gave a clear guidance to forest management in the country. The main commitments in the current forest policy 1994

include achieving the goal of SD, poverty alleviation, local people's participation in forest protection and governmental support for forestry sector development (MoEF, 1995; Khan, 2001a). Meanwhile, Mustafa (2002) has already analysed the trend of Bangladesh forest policy starting from 1894 till now in his article on "Bangladesh Forest Policy Trend". In his paper, he showed the emergence and changes of the forest policy in Bangladesh according to the requirement of national and global concern over time. He mentioned that the forest policy in the country has always been strongly influenced by the changing political situation over the history of Bangladesh. The salient features of the policies related to protected forest area were: The first *national forest policy of Bangladesh*, an independent country, was redefined in 1979. Here the important policy statements were to preserve forests carefully and to manage them scientifically. This policy talked about expanding plantation and included mass participation issue to implement that. Extraction and utilisation of forest resources in an optimum level was allowed to meet the need of countries growing uses of modern technology. It seems that the objective of the policy was not thinking towards sustainable development of environment at all. Additionally, the policy introduced for the first time to ensure conservation of the natural environment as well as the wildlife as a tool to promote recreational facilities for attracting tourists. Moreover, this goal of the policy gave more focus on economic development by using the authority of conserving nature and creating opportunities for rich people to exploit and to marginalise local tribal people.

In 1994 the new *national forest policy* was re-launched and officially announced on May 31, 1995<sup>3</sup>. This policy initiated a 20-year FMP to preserve and develop the national forest resources. The main elements of this policy are to reduce poverty and also to ensure sustainable development through people's participation. The objectives of the Forest Policy 1994 are: to increase the forest coverage to 20 percent of the total land area to meet the basic needs of the present and future generations; to ensure greater contribution of forest sector in country's economic development; to enrich biodiversity by conserving the natural habitats and strengthen agriculture by conserving land and water resources; to prevent illegal occupation of forest land, illegal tree felling and hunting of wild animal through local people's participation.

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<sup>3</sup> Please see Bangladesh Gazette Book, July 6, 1995, pp 241-244



One of the very important aims of this present policy document is to create employment opportunities and to alleviate poverty through increasing the rural and national economy and to expand forest based rural development (MoEF, 1995).

The policy statement in 1994 focused more on local people's participation in managing the forest area and its resources. It stated that buffer zones attached to protected areas could be allocated for tree farming and agro-forestry, forest department is responsible for protection and management of the national forest but the need of local people for using the resources will be accommodated through participatory management. Moreover, the statement also ensures that the traditional rights of people living within the adjacent to designated forest areas will be maintained and their cultural values and religious belief related to the forest area will be respected.

### **3.2 Forest Master Plan (FMP)**

The forestry sector master plan was completed in 1993 with technical and financial assistance from ADB and UNDP. This plan identified the strength and weakness of the sector and built a long term strategy to guide and to bring about a noticeable sectoral development. The objective of the FMP is to optimise the contribution of forest resources for bringing sustainable development to the Environment as well as for economic and social development. To achieve the objectives of the master plan the policy issues were identified and suggested to improve the use of forest resources. From the perspective of ensuring sustainable land use and fulfilling the basic needs of local people the management of forest resources is also a major concern for maintaining SD.

### **3.3 Forest Management**

In recent years the emphasis in forestry and forest management is increasing towards maximising sustainability through local people's participation, conserving biodiversity and maintaining forestry services. In this context, the management plan guides the forest manager to manage forest resources in day to day work plan. However, an efficient and scientific management system can bring sustainable environmental, social and economic development to the sector as well as to the country.

In the report of ADB on Bangladesh Forest Policy Reform, it is suggested that as the forests regenerate and integrate multiple resources, the forest management should also consider having multiple focus and orientation (Khan, 2001b). The aim of agreed forest management of ADB are to reduce poverty as well as to meet the local people's need; to ensure economic development through employment generation in forestry industry; to ensure sustainable environment, regeneration, conservation and biodiversity; to promote eco tourism and/or recreation facilities; to manage disaster; to encourage education and research for the forestry sector (ibid). In line with these ADB objectives, the goals of present forest management in Bangladesh which is guided by the FMP are also to increase timber production as well as to provide clean air and water, healthy habitat for wildlife and to act as a major source of biodiversity conservation and nature-based tourism. As such, in the official document of Bangladesh forest management, it is stated clearly that eco tourism can be an alternative mechanism for environmentally sustainable development. It is being considered as a tool to enhance environmental conservation and preservation without exploiting the forest resources as well as without disturbing its habitat and biodiversity (MoEF, undated-a).

Regarding forest management towards conserving biodiversity, the Centre for Policy Dialogue (CPD) (2001), a renowned civil society think tank of Bangladesh, has recommended to encourage the Eco Park or national park projects in their policy brief document as well as in their review policy brief document (CPD, 2003). However, they clearly made the suggestion of separating the wildlife and park management from the commercial forest land management and link those activities with the eco tourism components. Besides, the park department should get the authority and the responsibility to conserve biodiversity towards a SD. Both the documents suggested promoting eco tourism in the national parks. All the facilities inside the parks must be developed by the Forest Department of Bangladesh to fulfil the requirements of tourists from home and abroad. Moreover, the sanctuaries and other reserves have been recommended to be kept off limit to visitors. It is also stated in CPD's policy brief that to maintain the balanced ecosystem and to guarantee sustainable development, local people's participation much be ensured in the park management scheme and their traditional knowledge should be incorporated in the management process.

### 3.4 The Protected Areas of Bangladesh<sup>4</sup>

In view of the fact that forest sector is permanently facing exhaustion, depletion and over exploitation by the increasing population, the National Forest Policy 1994 emphasises on protecting some of the forest areas for ensuring SD. As mentioned earlier, Bangladesh has identified protected areas into three Broad categories which are national parks, wildlife sanctuary and game reserves. The IUCN definition of protected area is:

*“Protected Area is an area of land and/or sea especially dedicated to the protection of biological diversity, and of natural and associated cultural resources, and managed through legal or other effective means”* (McNeely, 1993; IUCN, 1994)

There are 8 national parks, 7 wildlife sanctuaries and 1 game reserve as well as 5 other conservation sites designed for conserving biodiversity and ensuring a balanced ecosystem (Map-2). These area covers around 2400 km<sup>2</sup> represents 16% of the total forest area managed by the government (calculated by the author from the information in Forest Department website). The number and area of existing Eco Parks and national parks are shown in Annex B. The definition of national park, placed below, is specified in the Bangladesh Wildlife (Preservation) Order, 1973:

*“National Park means comparatively large areas of outstanding scenic and natural beauty with the primary object of protection and preservation of scenery, flora and fauna in the natural state to which access for public recreation and education and research may be allowed”* (paragraph) (p) of Article 2).

The forest department is responsible to manage the protected areas of Bangladesh. Besides, the national policy goal is to increase the protected area under reserved forest by 10% by the year 2015. Definition of the term reserved forest is clearly stated in the Forest Act 1927 which is:

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<sup>4</sup> The information of this part is taken from the official government website of MoEF. The information was also derived from an official project proposal of MoEF (2005) where the Ministry prepared the proposal as a focal Ministry for Convention of Biological Diversity.

*Reserved forest* Any forest land or wasteland belonging to the government, or to which it has proprietary rights, may be constituted a reserved forest subject to completion of notification and settlement procedures provided under the Act.

Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) has identified several projects to build Eco Parks in the protected areas as well as in the reserve forests for biodiversity conservation and economic development. The definition of Eco Park, placed below, is taken from an official project proposal<sup>5</sup>.

*“Eco Park is a recreational or an entertainment Park, enriched with nature and biodiversity, where tourists are encouraged to come and enjoy the scenic beauty, nature and variety of birds, animals, flora and fauna very closely within an Eco Park-friendly environment. Here in the Eco Park, different varieties of local and exotic trees are grown in order to create and preserve a strong genetic pool which plays an important role to conserve biodiversity and environment as well as to encourage a forestation. The park is designed to improve and extend rare/extinct wild animal species as their residents, breeding centre and roaming area as well as to conserve biodiversity, therefore, it is considered as a field of research and education. Finally, the Eco Park plays an important role in developing socio-economic and environmental conditions through creating alternative employment opportunities for the local inhabitant.”*

GoB has identified and implemented the first Eco Park project, covering the hill ecosystem, in Sitakundoo, Chittagong. Therefore, implementations of some other Eco Park projects are also on-going in Madhabkunda and Muraichara. Additionally, a safari park in Cox’s Bazaar and a national park in Chittagong Hill Tracts are under development. A list of all the approved Eco Park projects is presented in Annex C. Moreover, tourism is also being designed and developed in the selected protected areas to maintain the socio-cultural diversity of tribal communities where their rights are promised to be protected.

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<sup>5</sup> The definition is translated from Bangla.

### **3.5 Eco Park Projects in Bangladesh**

The Fourth Five-Year Plan (1990 - 1995) of Bangladesh recognised forestry as a sub-sector for initiating development projects at sectoral level. Some of the major sectoral objectives, mentioned in the fourth-year plan, are conservation of wildlife and environment as well as development of recreational facilities (GoB, 1995)—which are similar to the aims of forest management. As mentioned earlier, to fulfil these objectives, the GoB has initiated some Eco Parks projects in different protected and reserved forest areas of Bangladesh.

The project proposals show that most of the approved Eco Park projects have more or less similar goals on ensuring sustainable development. These broadly include promotion of Eco tourism, conservation of bio-diversity, expansion of education and research facilities, preservation of exotic and extinct species of plants, herbs, orchids, medicinal plants etc., and creation of breeding grounds for endangered and rare species of wildlife. Project wise objectives are presented in Annex C

### **3.6 The Government's View on Eco Park Projects**

In recent years, many new projects are being designed and initiated integrating the elements of Eco Park concepts under different names in different parts of the country. Before these projects get approval, they are thoroughly scrutinised by the Planning Commission. The commission has to be convinced that these environment-related projects have potentials to yield positive result for the environment as well as for the nation as a whole in concrete terms. The approved project proposals must explicitly express their intentions in developing Eco Parks through ensuring sustainable development by fulfilling the project objectives.

#### ***3.6.1 Effect of the Eco Park Projects***

The project proposals ensure that there will be no negative impact of the project on the environment, rather, the projects will play a significant role in maintaining a sustainable natural ecosystem through an intensive management. The proposals also ensure that the Eco Park projects will conserve flora and fauna of particular areas and create more natural resources. At the same time, the projects will preserve the cultural heritage of the locality to avert any possible negative effect on the society.

### ***3.6.2 Expected Benefit from the Project***

The official proposals say that the Eco Park projects are basically development-oriented ones, as these create opportunities for entertainment and conserve biodiversity. The benefits of environmental projects are very difficult to estimate in quantitative terms. But these are expected to generate both the tangible and intangible benefits. The tangible benefits will be estimated from the revenue earned throughout the year from entry fees of tourists; rentals from rest houses, cottages and picnic spots; and fees for using other recreational facilities, local transports and infrastructures. The intangible benefits to derive from the Eco Park projects broadly include the expansion of nature-friendly eco-tourism, which is supposed to benefit educationists, researchers and tourists.

On the other hand, the government is also considering that the Eco Park projects will provide service benefits to the local inhabitants. For example, it is seen from the project proposals that the projects will guarantee oxygen availability, absorption of carbon-dioxide, control temperature rise, reduction in air, water and noise pollution, stop land degradation, create recreational opportunities, increase moisture and fertility of lands, maintain adequate water flow in the water table, safe home and roaming place for wild animals, balance ecosystem, ensure safe shelter for tree dependent animals and other species, and so on. If the cost of these intangible elements can be estimated<sup>6</sup> in monetary value, the project will definitely be a profitable bargain for the nation.

### ***3.6.3 Policy and Practice***

When the approved Eco Park projects were in their implementation stage, the national media reported that the projects did not take the local tribal people into consideration and unfortunately, the implementation of the projects was started without any consultation with the local tribes (Hotline Asia, 2003). As such, the local tribal inhabitants of the project areas are scared of being uprooted from their ancestral lands, losing their traditional economic practices and having their rights violated. But the government clearly announced that no tribal people will be displaced; rather they will

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<sup>6</sup> For project analysis it is very important to do the cost benefit analysis before its implementation. As far as the intangible benefits are concerned, these can also be quantified by using various indirect methods through compensation principle, willingness to pay for using Eco Parks for psychological satisfaction and/or through calculating the opportunity cost/benefit.

be the part of the projects (Mortoza, 2004). Most of the national newspapers further reported that the conflicts between the tribal groups and the government authorities over this issue turned into violence and both the parties blamed each other. The views of the authorities on the conflicts are very different from those of the tribal groups. As none of the projects has been completed as yet, there is a lack of hard evidence showing negative impacts of the projects on the tribal people. The major concern here is to have a justification of the situation and find out why the tribal people are reacting so strongly.

In this regard, a Research Officer of the forest department said that *the conflict has completely derived from the political interest of a particular group. The government has not resorted to violence. Rather it promises the tribal people to provide them with alternative livelihood strategies and proper relocation when needed.* On the other hand, the Union Nirbahi Officer (UNO) of Kulaura, said that *the uncertainty of displacement from their ancestral lands, dispossession of traditional land ownership, apprehension of being an object of curiosity to the tourists, and fear of trespassing by the outsiders lead the tribal people for this immediate protest against the Eco Park projects. They are not even realising the positive side of the projects which could improve their livelihood and preserve their traditional socio-cultural practices.* To justify the need of having an Eco Park in this densely populated country like Bangladesh, he explained that, *“for any country, the minimum percentage of forest area should be optimum (for the overall ecology). This is more important for a densely populated country like Bangladesh to maintain a healthy environment. I think good managed Eco Park projects can emphasise forest conservation in a more efficient manner”.*

Additionally, he noted that *there is mistrust among the tribal people about the government due to their past experience with the government. They do not rely on the government’s promises because of their experience.* He also admitted that *there are only some unwritten assurances to relocate the Khasi tribe<sup>7</sup> in other villages, but alternative livelihood strategies for this particular tribal group, in real sense, are yet absent.*

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<sup>7</sup> The description of Khasi tribe is given in Chapter 5.



The forest conservator and director of the Forest Sector Project, however, says that *there is no problem with the current forest policy. The participatory forest management and protected area development plans are all prepared in line with the current forest policy.* Interestingly, he claims that *most of the protected areas are located outside the country's forest area and these should not create any conflict of interest between forest and protected areas. Only in the Madhupur Park, erecting fence is creating a problem with the tribal people, which the government will resolve soon through consultation.* Referring to the official website, he also states that *the tribal people, living outside the protected areas are working in the existing social forestry programme where they earn within the benefit sharing arrangement* (MoEF, undated-b). According to the director and the website, the local tribal and poor people are involved in all kind of activities related to the forestry sector, like in aforestation and plantation programmes, wood based industry, saw milling, furniture making, establishing private nursery and so on. Even the tribal people also grow crops in the government's Khash land in between two plantations time. He claims that *there are alternative livelihood opportunities for the tribal people if they are been displaced for pursuing any development project to meet the national interest.* However, the conservator also mentioned that *even though most of the protected areas are outside the forest area, some area should be set aside from there to conserve bio-diversity but these locations should be selected very carefully.*

By analysing the above information collected through interview, it can be explained that the GoB sees the Eco Park projects as a good policy tool for ensuring sustainable forest management which is providing the tribal people with access to alternative livelihood and access to participation. Thus, the government officials are emphasising that these projects are expected to generate employment opportunities for the tribal people and conserve bio-diversity. The authority has taken it for granted that the tribal people will accept the projects and they will consider consultation with tribal people only if needed.

### **3.7 Criticism of the Main Policy Approach**

The current forest policy is talking about alleviating rural poverty but nothing is clearly stated there in the policy or management document about the distribution of resources, hierarchy of social stratification and how to deal with political influences.



Most importantly, buzz word like local people's participation in protecting forest and biodiversity has been used as a policy goal but there are hardly any scope offered in the policy document to achieve the real meaning of people's participation. Therefore, the local people's involvement always remains symbolic in initiating any development projects (Khan, 2001b). Like the national forest policy, CPD also took the top down approach to analyse the national policy document and made their recommendations. CPD has included the whole forest sector under their task force on 'Environment' and gave less emphasis on the sector development. However, their policy documents encouraged Eco Park and ecotourism as a tool for sustainable forest and protected area management. CPD have emphasised on the necessity of local people's involvement in implementing Eco Park projects for tourism and ensuring sustainable development. But, they also bypassed the effort to analyse the economic and socio-cultural effect of Eco Parks on the local tribal people. Similarly, after looking at the past situation and decisions taken by the government to promote development programs and projects, it is clear that the participation and rights of local people were repeatedly ignored and violated, which Mustafa (2002) also confirmed. In this context, the example of social forestry in the Sal forest and the implementation of Kaptai Hydropower project can be referred, as mentioned earlier (sec 1.2, page 3), to show the evidence and the consequences (Gain, 1998).

With the existing criticism of the forest policy and management documents, the main challenge of this paper is to weigh the evidences from both positive and negative perspective. The government is initiating the projects definitely with good intention for the sustainable forest management. But if the Eco Park projects are emphasising on preserving biodiversity and creating infrastructures only for attracting tourists and ensuring economic benefit, then whose development have been considered here. The concern will also remain as how the interest of tribal people are been protected if they are not even consulted in the project design and implementation stage. Moreover, after analysing the forest policy and management document some questions arises immediately, for example, is it viable to create Eco Parks in the areas where people are residing from generations; and/or if the parks are creating conflict and disturbing the traditional practices of tribal people then how these projects can bring sustainable development?

This question of sustainability of Eco Park projects can also be analysed in the light of donor interest, as evident from the interview with Phillip Gain. He said, *“one has to keep in mind, it is not the eco-parks that pose the biggest threats in Modhupur or Sylhet; the biggest threats come to the Adivasis or "tribal" peoples from commercial/industrial plantations among others funded by the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank with support from the donor countries. Sad enough there is little or no attention from the local and international campaigners to the real problems, which the donors want to hide.”*

He added that *“Bangladesh does not have home-grown public policy in the forestry sector. It is the ADB, the World Bank and the UN organizations that have imposed policies on Bangladesh in the interests of the donor countries and those of the companies and consultants.*

From Gain’s reaction it is clear that there are also the interests of donor countries and a group of elite businessmen to pursue these types of projects in Bangladesh. According to Kabir (2004) *“The concept of eco-park might have been exported to Bangladesh by some donor countries or agencies to give us foreign loan and in return we have to pay them back a heavy rate of interest on that loan, consultancy fees, equipment and machinery purchase from those countries in the name of so called development work for their own benefit and profit”*. In this context, it is obvious for the government to have more economic benefit from the projects rather than considering local people’s interest.

#### **4. IMPACT OF ECO PARK PROJECTS ON LOCAL RESIDENTS AND THEIR VIEWS**

*This chapter analyses the impact of Eco Park projects on tribal people. Two case studies are presented in first section to analyse the debate from people's perspective. The rights of tribal people are discussed in general sense in section 4.2. This is followed by a brief description of the local people, their livelihood and socio-cultural practice to illustrate their dependency on the forest areas. The third section explains the effects of project on these people using the indicators derived in Chapter 2 and the analysis of the collected information is placed in the appropriate sections. The chapter concludes by showing the protest and reaction of tribal people against the projects and the rationale of this immediate reaction.*

##### **4.1 Implementation of Eco Park Projects: Case Studies**

The following descriptions concern two Eco Park projects which have been implemented in Bangladesh.

###### **4.1.1 Madhupur National Park**

The announcement that an Eco Park would be built on 25,600 acre (40 sq miles) area of Madhupur forest was made back in 1982 by the GoB, but could not be implemented at the time due to strong protest of local indigenous peoples against the project (Hotline Asia, 2003). In 2000, the government planned and proposed the Eco Park project with the idea of forest conservation and promoting eco-tourism (Gomes, 2004). The implementation of the project started in 2003 as a joint venture of GOB and the World Bank (Tim, undated) with the title of "Madhupur National Park Development Project" (Bowes, 2004).

At the initial stage, The National Eco Park is being built covering 3000 acre of land of the Modhupur forest (ibid) as pilot basis. The current attraction includes 176 species of exotic plants, 21 species of mammals, 140 species of birds and 29 reptiles. The revenue collection from this park amounted 6,00,000 Taka per year (9,122 US Dollar per year) in terms of entrance fee (MoEF, undated-c). However, the government planned to build lots of outdoor recreational facilities for tourists in the Modhupur National Park which include rest-house, picnic area, camping ground, flower garden, children's playground, golf driving range, a man-made lake, horse track, bicycle

track, forest trail, restaurant, etc.. Additionally, to attract more tourists to this eco-park, an orchid house, cactus house, butterfly enclosure, aviary for small birds, enclosures for wild jungle animals and a five-meter high and 100-meter long canopy walk are also planned.

#### ***4.1.2 Madhobkundo - Muraichora Eco Park Project***

The decision of building Madhobkundo-Muraichora Eco Park project, using the deep forest area and the waterfalls situated there, came as a surprise to the local Khashi and Garo tribes. The 3-year project was approved by the Prime Minister in March, 2000 and by the Cabinet in July, 2000 (Goshwami, 2001), and finally inaugurated by the environment and forest Minister on April 15, 2001 (TWN, 2001). The project covers 1500 acre area where 667 acre from Madhobkundo and 883 acre from Muraichora. The design includes clearing of the forests and Khashi lands, felling trees, levelling the hill areas and constructing roads and other facilities for promoting ecotourism as a part of the economic development plan of the country (Goshwami, 2001; Democratic Worker Party, 2001). The current revenue collection from the entrance fee in Madhabkunda Eco Park is 5,00,000 Taka per year (7602 US Dollar per year) (MoEF, undated-d).

#### **4.2 Tribal People's Rights in General**

The basic rights of tribal people are identified and declared internationally. The Draft UN declaration (1994) for rights of indigenous people asks for ensuring that the indigenous people can exercise their rights related to the access and control over their own land, territories and resources as well as to make decisions for their development needs. In this context, the tribal people have the right to contribute to the decision on which projects should be taken or rejected in their area. In line with the UN draft declaration, Rio Declaration on Development and Environment and a plan of action (Agenda 21), deals with the sustainable development, also recognises the cultural identity and participatory rights of tribal people to ensure sustainable development (Bleie, 2005:55). Additionally, in order to achieve sustainable development, section 26.1 emphasises on ensuring the socio-economic and environmental rights of indigenous people which they should be able to practice freely. Convention of International Labour Organisation (ILO) 169 and 170 also declared similar rules and regulations on tribal people's rights.

#### ***4.2.1 Human Rights:***

Article 26.1 of Agenda 21 states, “Indigenous people and their communities shall enjoy the full measure of human rights and fundamental freedoms without hindrance or discrimination. In view of the interrelationship between the natural environment and its sustainable development and the cultural, social, economic and physical well-being of indigenous people, national and international efforts to implement environmentally sound and sustainable development should recognise, accommodate, promote and strengthen the role of indigenous people and their communities.” In line with this, the UN declaration also talks about fundamental freedoms, especially from any discrimination related to their identity and tribal origin in Article 1 and 2. Article 6 emphasises the right to self determination of their political status and economic, social and cultural development. Similarly articles 3, 4 and 8 of the ILO convention 169 also declared that the tribal people should enjoy freedom without any discrimination.

#### ***4.2.2 Rights to Pursue Socio-Economic Practices***

It is very important to understand the tribal people’s socio- economic practices as they are very different from the mainstream population. United Nations declared that alternative livelihood strategies must be provided to the tribal people as a fair compensation who have been deprived from their means of subsistence due to implementation of any development projects in their territories.

**4.2.3** Both the UN declaration and ILO convention put emphasis on the tribal people’s right to participate in the decision-making process for development projects, which may affect them. Tribal people should be informed and consulted before protecting or preserving their lands as well as before designing and implementing any project. These people should have free access to participate and give their views on the government decisions, which could have adverse effects on them.

#### ***4.2.4 Rights for Access to and Control over Land and other Resources***

The tribal peoples are displaced from their ancestral land as a consequence of pursuing so-called development projects for people’s interest. The violation of their rights worsens when the land laws overlaps with the forest laws where some of the

rights to use forest resources coexist with land use rights (Farooque, 1998; Khan, 2003).

The Draft UN declaration and ILO convention 107 and 169 state the similar rights of tribal people regarding land ownership and use of land and other resources. These articles emphasise that tribal people should not be forcibly removed from their lands or territory. If there is any need to relocate them, proper compensation should be provided to fulfil their present need and ensure future development. It is clearly stated that the tribal people's land ownership should be recognized and it should be taken into account that they have the right to control, conserve, develop and manage their land and other resources around them.

#### ***4.2.5 Cultural and Religious Rights***

The agenda 21 affirms that the indigenous people must have the right of ownership on their cultural and intellectual property. Similarly the Charter of the Indigenous-Tribal Peoples of Tropical Forests (Bengwayan, 1992:10) declared that as the tropical forests have spiritual value and it determines tribal people's cultural, economic and political survival, thus they should definitely have ownership over these tropical forests around the world. Moreover, regarding the economic practices of the tribal people, it is stated in section 3.2 that "while managing resources sustainably, an environmental policy that focuses mainly on the conservation and protection of resources must take due account of those who depend on the resources for their livelihoods. Otherwise it could have an adverse impact both on poverty and on chances for long-term success in resource and environmental conservation". Likewise, the UN declaration and ILO convention 162 stated very clearly that their rights regarding traditional culture and religious practices should be realised.

### **4.3 Tribal People's Livelihood, Culture and Religious Practices<sup>8</sup> in Bangladesh**

The GoB never discussed any aspect of the project proposals with the people residing in the approved Eco Park areas. Yet it is apparent that the execution of Eco Park projects will surely affect these local people. Among different tribal groups, the Garo and Khasia tribes will face the most immediate and adverse impact from the

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<sup>8</sup> Most of this information in this part is copied from Banglapedia (2004) and translated from the publication of Mehdy, 2005

implementation of these projects. These two tribes are described in the following sections.

#### ***4.3.1 Affected Tribal People***

The Garos are the main tribal group residing in Madhupur National Park area and they are locally known as Mandi. Some anthropologists say that Garos came from the north-east bank of Koknar Lake of the north-western Chinese province of Chinghai about 3-5 thousand years ago and were first settled in Tura province of Tibet and in Nakalbari area of Bhutan. After facing displacement for several times, they ended up in Rangpur of Bangladesh. Their bitter past experience of living in the mountain regions drove them to settle down in the forest zones of downhill areas. Gradually they spread out in northern part of Bangladesh. Currently, most of the Garo people live in northern Mymensingh bordering with India and in Madhupur Forest that is located in Mymensingh and Tangail districts (Bal, 2000). They can also be found mostly in the hills, hillocks, deep forests and places near fountains, springs, and other water bodies. The population size of Garo tribe is 64,280 with a total of 13,222 households (BBS, 1994) around the country.

*Khashia* tribal groups, locally known as Khasi, are residing in the Madhobkunda-Muraichora Eco Park project area side by side with the Garos. The number of Khashia population, living only in Moulovibazar, is about 7,500 within 1,484 households (BBS, 1994). Apparently, the Khashi tribe has migrated to Bangladesh from Assam where they had settled about five hundred years ago, presumably from Tibet. Hence, the Kashi people are dependent on hill, forests, mounds and bushes around them.

#### ***4.3.2. Livelihood of Garo and Khasi Tribal Groups***

Both Garo and Khashi tribes have agriculture-oriented lifestyle. But both groups have different system of crop production because of their geographical location. Garo people's main professions were *Jhum* cultivation, livestock farming and hunting. But now as the government has prohibited pursuing this cultivation system, they are now growing both dry and wet rice in the Sal forest (Khaleque, 1998; Bal, 2000). They also collect materials and resources from the forests around them to build their houses and to practice their traditional crop cultivation. The Garo women collect medicine plants, fuel wood, wild potatoes and various roots from the forests for consuming and



using those in their day-to-day lives. They get fish for consumption from the local rivers name-Bongshai and Banar<sup>9</sup>.

The Khashi and Garo people, living in the hill forest area, are growing wet rice. The Khashi tribe practices the *Jhum* cultivation in the hill areas. During last hundreds of years the Khashis have made Panpunjis as economic bases. They have planed and conserved the natural forest and cultivated betel leaves, betel nuts, lemons and pineapples. Traditionally they are using the soil of the hill forests for shifting cultivation, besides, they are using the big trees as the shade and support for growing betel leaves which is the centre of their livelihood support. They have their own tradition and knowledge of cultivating this profitable crop which is adopted by them from their ancestors. There is no chance to destroy the environment by practicing this type of cultivation method, rather they are preserving the trees and conserving the forest areas for their own livelihood.

It is interesting to note that the local non-tribal people of Sylhet division are involved in the marketing of these betel leaves and by selling these leaves these people alone are earning 50 million taka per month. Moreover, the country is earning valuable foreign currency by exporting high quality betel leaves to USA, UK and Middle East (Ajad, 2004). It implies that Khasias are earning enough for a decent living from their *Panpunjis* and if these are being destroyed in the name of promoting other development projects that would not be acceptable for local Khasia people even though the Eco Park may bring more economic benefit for the country.

#### ***4.3.3 Religious and Socio-Cultural life of Garo and Khashi:***

The cultural and religious practices for all the tribal people are primarily dependent on the forests land and resources around them as the rituals, behaviours and practices originated from the use and availability of natural resources around them.

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<sup>9</sup> Recently the social forestry is contributing to the soil erosion in the forest area. These soils are being deposited in these rivers and decreasing the flow of the river current as well as reducing the fish production.



Garos were following their traditional religion, a form of animism, for ages but they have been converted to Christianity (Khaleque, 1998) very recently for immediate economic gain as the Baptists Christians offered them direct financial assistance. Though most of the Garoes are proud to introduce themselves as Christians, they still follow their traditional religion *Sangshareq* which has the elements of *Mantra Tantra* and magic. They have very close relations with nature and related non-living objects around them and they believe that snakes and tigers are there as forms of their dead souls.

Garos are renowned for eating almost everything they find around them<sup>10</sup> though fruits are their staple food. They use pieces of bamboo for cooking and burnt banana barks to use the ashes as ingredients of cooking as well as to make salt and soap. The moon, sun, rain, rivers and crops are like gods to Garos. They sow paddy in the Bangla month of *Chaitra* (March-April) by clearing the jungles, burning woods and uses this ashes while planning crops.

Khashia's are also very attached with their traditions and customs which is core of their religion as well. They have influences of Hinduism, Christianity and Islam in their cultural lives. At present more than 80 percent Khasias are Christian and the conversion to Christianity had a tremendous impact on their socio-economic structure. Yet they practice many rituals which came from their old age custom and tradition. They think God created the universe first and then men and women and to control all the various aspect of the universe all the other god and goddesses are created. According to them, marriage is the direct command from the God. They perform certain kind of dance as ritual, called *khyakhang brata*, in the time of seed sowing. Rice and fish are the staple food for Khashia tribes.

In both the societies the husband stays at the wife's house after getting marriage and generally Garo men do all the household works, on the contrary, the Khasia men and wife do their household and cultivation work based on co-operation and mutual understanding.

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<sup>10</sup> From Banglapedia, 2004 it is been known that one Mughal Army Commander exaggerated the fact and said that garos eat every thing except iron but in reality they eats all the animals except cat as that is the symbol of showing their religious and/or cultural value.

#### **4.3.4 Land Ownership System among Both Tribal Groups**

The Mandi's did not have any history of land ownership. They do not have any documents for their lands and for generations do not pay any rent or tax for using those lands. But after paying regular tax and cultivating rice in the British period, they established their rights on that piece of land and received the authority to sell the land. Unfortunately, in 1951 when the *Zamindari system* was abolished and the part of Madhupur forest were declared as National Park, the authority did not consider their ownership which led to an increasing conflict with them (Mehdy, 2005:p-40).

On the other hand, the Khashi tribes have the evidence of possessing lands with proper documents in the local government office (dealing with the land issues) and the government is not authorised to displace them in the name of reserving forests area in their ancestral lands (ibid, p-47). For both the Mandi and Khashi tribes, the mother is the owner of all assets and the girls become the heir of those land and resources as they have the matriarchal society. Even the wife gets ownership of the assets earned by the husband in Garo tribes and in Khashia tribes the women do the monetary transactions.

#### **4.4 The Effect of Eco Park**

Mr. Dhrong, tribal leader and activist, stated that *the Eco Park is violating human rights in every aspect*. Citing an example of the Garo tribe, he said that if they protest against the government projects, they are being accused and charged in false cases. *They had previous experience that Forest Department filed hundreds of false cases against them. There is not a single Garo who has not been accused in a forest case in Modhupur. Some of them are even involved in more than 60 cases.*

##### **4.4.1 Access to Livelihood**

The forest act 1927 states that the tribal people have the right to use the watercourses within the forests, to pasture and they also have the right of the way. Moreover, the tribal people have the right to use the forest products and have a secured employment opportunity without destroying the ecology of the forests. But as stated in all the international and national declarations and acts, if there is any need to protect or reserve forest areas which could hamper these rights, then alternative strategies and/or any other compensation in the form of land or money for their livelihood must be

provided (Rahman, 2000; Farooque, 1998). As such, in the case of Eco Park projects which are designed to be built in their ancestral lands, the government has not considered to provide any alternatives which the tribal people can happily accept. Phillip Gain showed his concern in this regard, saying that "*I doubt the government has any concrete strategy to assist the 'tribal' people*".

It is believed that the livelihood of tribal people will be hampered if these projects come into action. The women will have restricted access inside the Madhupur forest area from where they collect ingredients for their daily consumption. Due to reduction of natural forests, the opportunities of getting access to their food have already declined, on top of that the Eco Park will put them into a more vulnerable situation towards surviving (Mehdy, 2005). In the case of Madhobkundo-Muraichora, the Khasia's already face losses of cultivable land due to a huge blow-out of a gas field in another part of Moulvibazar district in 1997. The devastation was irreversible as regaining natural fertility of forests and soil, ecological restoration of wildlife, flora and fauna was next to impossible. The land became unsuitable for cultivating betel leaves and Khasi's lost their means of production. On top of that the government is imposing the Eco Park projects on them and restricting their access to the remaining lands without any consideration (TWN, 2001). People believe that the huge *Panpunji*, consisting of 500 acre land area within the Madhobkunda eco park project will be destroyed if the park is been built (Mehdy, 2005)

As mentioned earlier, the government is highlighting that the park projects are going to be beneficial for the tribal people as they will generate more employment in the tourism sector, and that they will have the opportunity to use the *Khash* lands which were originally their ancestral lands. But the tribal people fear that the ownership pattern in using the Khash land might not be the same as in the past, and that they may not be able to practice their traditional way of cultivation in those lands. Again, in the tourism sector, there is much possibility that the only those people will get jobs who have links or association with the power structure and with the newly evolved businessman in this sector. The tribal people will remain excluded from the formal service sector as the whole business environment will be very different for them to cope with or they can be offered to be wage labourer at best, (TWN, 2001). The indigenous knowledge of managing forests areas and resources as well as their ethno-

botanical knowledge will also be vanished (Mehdy, 2005) during the course of time if these tribal people lose themselves in this stream of artificial conservation system for economic benefit.

#### ***4.4.2 Access to Meaningful Participation***

The major gap in planning and implementing the Eco Park projects is that the Government did not consider Mandi and Khashi peoples problems and exclude them from the decision making process while undertaking these projects (Hotline Asia, 2003; The Daily Star, 2003; Mehdy, 2005). Regardless of the fact that these people are residing there for generations and using their indigenous knowledge of sustainable forest management, the government has never consulted with the local tribal people (TWN, 2001; The Daily Star, 2003; Mehdy, 2005) and imposed the Eco Park projects on them. For example, when the Environment and Forest Ministry formed a six-member Committee to verify the demand of the tribal people to judge their acquisition regarding their eviction by the project, there were no tribal representatives in the committee. As such, when the tribal group protested against this and wanted their own representative in the committee they received no response from the authority. After a while the convener of the committee invited some of the Garo and Khasi headmen to accompany him in the next meeting but “they (the headmen) became frustrated that the convener, instead of listening to them, only tried to put pressure on them” (TWN, 2001).

Dhrong stated the fact that *the Forest Department had never consulted with the tribal people about the Eco Park projects which could affect them. Even in the past, the forest department took several projects like woodlot plantation, rubber plantation, social forestry, building national parks etc. which imposed eviction on the tribal peoples and from the beginning, the Garos were the victims of these kinds of projects.*

#### ***4.4.3 Rights Regarding Land Ownership and Access to Resources***

Absence of any clear documentation for the land rights of these tribal people is a long-standing controversial issue which often triggers conflict. Other than the protest from different groups of people, this documentation problem is also a very concerning issue in creation and implementation of the Eco Park projects. Currently it has been reported that after building a 5000 feet boundary wall around the Madhupur park area,

the government has appointed a contractor for building another wall of 30,000 feet (Rahman, 2005). These developments have worried the local tribal people deeply, because they have nowhere else to go if they are being displaced from their ancestral lands. They are not even given any alternative livelihoods opportunities by the government as yet.

Mr. Dhrong has added an interesting point regarding the land ownership system inside the project area, *“the Government started making boundary wall and in some places they already built gates, and now these tribal peoples have to pay money (fee) for movement. But the forest department did not mention anything about the project. Then the Garos who had been living there for centuries started thinking that they might be captive within these wall and their lands would be taken by the forest department”*. He also explained that *these tribal people were very scared because they thought that after making boundary wall, they will not be able to live in the forest and their lands would be taken for use it as the Khash land. Additionally, Garos were the witness of the fact that the forest officials are destroying the forest and involved in stealing trees and eventually sell them and earn money. To be on the safe side, these officials accuse local people for stealing and destroying the trees and file cases against them. In this case the Garos thought again after building Eco Parks the forest department will take more illegal advantages from it and blame the local tribal people as usual which will eventually justify the eviction process from their homestead.*

Most important thing, according to Dhrong, is that *Eco-park project denied the traditional and ancestral land rights of indigenous peoples over their land and forest. In conjunction with the above gaps in creating a well-organized Eco Park, development of many small commercial centres, like timber and furniture shops, brick fields, are continuously increasing due to availability of Sal tree in the national park area. Lack of budget and man power is another hindering to maintain the national park. The weak enforcement of law is creating conflict between the tribal settlers and people who encroach on the park area.*

The project document clearly stated that the preservation of the forest area is very much needed to save the destruction of the rare species of trees (Sal and other trees which are not abundant). The prohibition of land use inside the park, such as cattle

grazing, cultivation and squatting, cutting and gathering of small-sized timber wood fire, vines, herbs, honey, wax and other minor forest products and enforcing strict ban of hunting, tapping/capturing and of any of protected species of mammals, birds, reptiles and amphibians will challenge the tribal peoples livelihood to some extent by ignoring their rights to use forest resources. On the other hand the government is still encouraging the social forestry program funded by ADB which is clearing the forest to cultivate pineapple and banana (Shiuly, 2004) though the tribal people are always blamed for forest clearance and destruction.

#### **4.4.4 Cultural Rights**

In the occasion of the inauguration of Madhobkundo–Muraichora Eco Park project, the Minister concerned announced that no local people will be displaced from their land and instead the area will be built as a cultural village where the tribal people will be part of the project (The Daily Star, 2003; Mehdy, 2005). This proposition leads to very obvious damage to the traditional culture and values of tribal people as their lifestyle will be considered as a means to satisfy and entertain the wealthy tourists. According to Mr. Sharier, Eco Park projects are violating the cultural rights of the local tribal people. He directly stated that *the culture of tribal people to be threaten directly by these projects, because the tourists of these parks will treat the local tribal people as “zoo animals”. Other than this, the tourists may ask for wine which the tribal people drinks as part of their religion and additionally, the women will also become vulnerable to exploitation.* For example, he explained that *in Ghazni (Mymensing) Eco Park area, the strangers begin offering money to the tribal women and young girls for sex.*

Similarly, Khatun (2001) expressed that other than working as tourist guide, wage labourer in hotels and restaurants these Khashi people will become the element of entertainment to an elite group of people. It seems that the authority is humiliating the tribal people in the name of being part of a development project which is not only violating their cultural rights but also violating the Human rights as a whole.

#### **4.4.5 Effect on Environment**

Shahrier shared his concern saying that *giving the access for picnic, using loudspeakers and disposable materials like plastic bottles, polythene bags will not*

*only disturb the tribal people's life but also destroy the Environment.* As such, the majority of the people are thinking that the Eco Park projects, encouraging ecotourism, will drive the current environmental condition into a very critical situation. Even the new constructions, build to attract, amuse and entertain tourists, would definitely bring negative impact on the environment as well as on the tribal residents in the area. (Tim, undated)

The environmentalists are also concern on the issue that the whole natural ecosystem of the area will be destroyed by building tourist facilities, evicting local people from the project area, as well as, encouraging plantation to create artificial forest. As a result, it will be impossible to get the balanced ecosystem back to its natural state. Interrelations between all the living objects like small and big animals, insects, flora fauna, human being, as well as the sun, wind, soil and the non-living objects make the balanced ecosystem in the forest areas. If one of these elements is displaced or distinct the whole balance will surely be jeopardised. Where the ecologists are emphasizing the role of a smallest animal like an ant or even any micro-organisms for protecting the balanced ecosystem and conserve biodiversity, our government tends to ignore the importance of a major actor of the system – the human being, while undertaking the development projects in the forests areas (Mehdi, 2005)

#### **4.5 People's View on Eco Park Projects**

In recent years the implementation of the Modhupur Eco Park and Madhobkunda-Muraichora Eco Park projects have created lots of conflicts, violations and debate among tribal people as well as among professionals like environmentalists, politicians, academicians as so on. The concerned people's views are completely different from the government. Thus, the people are considering these projects as a tool to devastate the environment as well as to destroy the tribal people's cultural and socio-economic practices. Evidently, the Bangladesh Landless Association (BLA) states "The real objectives of the misnamed 'eco-parks' are to evict minority ethnic groups - which goes hand in hand with environmental destruction - and to transfer public funds into the coffers of the construction industry" (TWN, 2001).



#### ***4.5.1 Rationale of Immediate Reaction of Tribal People***

It is true that whenever the government wanted to implement the Eco Park projects, the local people reacted immediately. In the interview, Mr. Phillip Gain reported that *these Eco Parks will threaten the tribal people's livelihood and the access to commons. Fencing will restrict their movement from reaching their livelihood means, tourists will bother them always and disturb them from leading a peaceful life. These uncertainties lead to immediate protest against the projects.* In this line, Dhrong said that *"the projects, named 'Eco-park project' are mainly the entertainment schemes. The number one objective of these projects is to expand recreational facilities for tourists. The Eco-park sounds nice, but the components of the projects are to build roads, houses, cottages, lakes, towers, picnic spots etc. There is nothing about forest preservation in the proposals."* Thus, the tribal people knew that the projects would bring more grief and hurdles rather than improving their quality of life. According to Mehdy (2005), the commercial interests of a particular elite group behind building the Eco Park projects in the name of conserving biodiversity and promoting ecotourism have been disclosed to the residents of those project areas. So, the people protested immediately before it became too late for them to try and stop the adverse effect of the projects.

#### ***4.5.2 Reaction of People against the Implementation of the Projects***

Building of physical infrastructures to attract tourists will surely restrict the access to forest and forest resources for both the tribes. These people have no other option for supporting their livelihood both socially and economically as their livelihoods fully depend on the forest. To protect their rights in every aspect, some organisations and some mainstream population of the country also opposed the implementation of the Eco Park project together with the tribal groups. Specially, after getting the request for legal assistance from the tribal community leaders, Bangladesh Environmental Lawyers Association (BELA) and Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) have submitted a legal notice against the management of the forest as well as against the implementation of the Madhupur National park development project, (Shiuly 2004). Even for the Madhobkundo- Muraichora project, the indigenous leader Santu Larma said that they would file a writ against the Eco Park project planning authority (TWN, 2001). Both BELA and SEHD, criticised the project's legal basis



and conservation approach and with the tribal leaders they also demanded to stop implementing these projects as long as the public hearing is organized (ibid).

As a part of democratic movement, the representatives from Bangladesh Forum for Indigenous People (BFIP) met the Minister concerned to discuss the matter. The authority assured him that the Khashi people will not be evicted rather they will be part of the Eco Park but this was also not acceptable to the Khashi tribe. Consequently, all tribal people started a movement to stop the projects and they started protesting against the project planning authority and against the government.

A renowned and well circulated national newspaper of Bangladesh, The Daily Star (2004a), reported that at least two Garo youths were shot dead and 25 others, including women and children, injured in the Madhupur forest when they were obstructing the construction wall to be completed as part of their protest against the Eco Park project. The local tribal people gave a seven-day ultimatum to the Prime Minister to cancel the National Park Development Project, to dismiss the environmental Minister, along with other demands. Similarly, to stop the Madhobkunda-Muraichora Project, the Bangladesh Adibashi Forum, formed by the Indigenous leaders, called a meeting and demanded to stop establishing any Eco Park projects on their ancestral lands on March 31, 2001. Other than establishing committees, to protest against the violence there were protest rallies, public gatherings press conferences, published leaflets and hunger strike against the plan which was again supported by a large number of politicians<sup>11</sup>, local community leaders, cultural activists, academicians, writers, journalists, student organisations and the general public. Most of them demanded the judicial investigation and trial for the killer of the Garo victims. Furthermore, BFIP also scheduled a protest meeting for campaigning<sup>12</sup> against the Eco Park projects in the National Shaheed Miner (The Daily Star, 2004b).

The above discussion leads to the fact that the Eco Park projects are creating uncertainty, mistrust and clash of interest among the tribal people and that is the reason of their negative approach about the project. The main goals of the Eco Park

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<sup>11</sup> Political Parties include Gono Forum, the 11-party left alliance, Communist Party of Bangladesh (CPB)

<sup>12</sup> The slogan was "Stop the Eco Park on Khasi and Garo Acestor Land" (TWN, 2001)

projects, from the government perspective, look standard and if these goals can be achieved then it may bring real sustainable development. But the concern here is that the government is putting much emphasise on facilitating tourism in the name of protecting forest and ignoring people's participation from the whole process. It implies that these Eco Park projects can be good policy instrument only through proper implementation and through cooperation between the government and the local people.

## 5. CONCLUSION

*This research started with the question whether the Eco Park projects can ensure sustainable forest management or not. This concluding chapter summarises the views on the issue from both the government and the people and explains the argument with the help of the principles derived from the theoretical background.*

### 5.1 Eco Park Projects as Policy Instrument: Two Sides of the Coin

The statement of the National Forest Policy 1994 emphasises on integrating local people in protecting and managing the forest area. Their demands, needs, traditional rights, forest related cultural and religious values have to be considered and maintained by the forest department. The forest management document not only aimed at increasing public participation and benefit of the forest but it also pressed for the need to promote ecotourism as alternative mechanism for sustainable development without the intrusion into the lives of the people and their environment. The GoB has initiated Eco Park projects with the stated aim of generating employment opportunities for local tribal people, preserving their cultural heritage, conserving the biodiversity and promoting ecotourism, as a tool to ensure sustainable forest management of the country. The analysis of the government's view on the projects shows that the Eco Parks will bring immense benefit in both tangible and intangible manner. On the contrary, the people (both tribal and mainstream) are saying that the main aim of these projects is only to fulfil the commercial interests of certain elite groups. According to the Bangladesh Landless Association (BLA), "The real objectives of the misnamed 'Eco Parks' are to evict minority ethnic groups - which goes hand in hand with environmental destruction - and to transfer public funds into the coffers of the construction industry" (TWN, 2001).

If the projects are generating employment opportunities, bringing economic benefit and conserving bio-diversity to balance the economic, social and biological system of the area, as the government is promising, then according to Barrow's sustainable development diagram (figure 1, chapter 2, page-12), sustainable forest management will definitely be ensured. On the other hand, the analysis of people's view shows that the Eco Park projects are restricting tribal people's access to the forests lands and resources as well as hampering their traditional economic bases and cultural and religious practices which leads to violation of human rights and uncertainty in project

success. Again, in the Barrow's model, the circle of social system talks about addressing the issues of social justice and people's participation and the economic circle talks about ensuring equity and supply of basic needs. The analysis of people's view shows that the eco park projects have failed to address the elements of both the circles and, therefore, challenging the sustainability.

## **5.2 Eco Park Projects and Their Consequences: Local Tribal People Matter**

The role of Eco Park projects and their consequences are analysed on the basis of the 4 indicators, developed in chapter 2.

Access to livelihood: Generally speaking, the tribal peoples in Bangladesh depend mostly on forest and its resources. Agriculture is the major occupation for most of the tribal groups. They have their own way of cultivating crops using their knowledge passed on for generations. Tribal people are concerned to have restricted access to the forest area with the implementation of the park projects which will disturb their traditional livelihood opportunities. However, the authority is claiming that Eco Parks will not hamper their livelihood rather they will be provided with alternative livelihood strategies when needed.

Access to land and resources: The tribal people do not have the official land ownership whereas the Garo and Khashia tribes claim that they have land rights and ownership in their Matriarchal society. These people were never concerned about the legality of their ownership for the forest land which resulted in land dispute problems among the tribal groups for the last couple of years. In this case, the Eco Park will further intensify the land ownership problem whereas, the government is ensuring that the tribal people will be given access to the *Khash* lands for crop production if they are displaced from their ancestral land for national interest.

Access to people's participation: People's participation is an important element in the current people-oriented National Forest Policy 1994, to ensure sustainability and efficiency of the policy implementation. But unfortunately, the implementation of Eco Park projects was started without any consultation with the local tribes (Hotline Asia, 2003).

*Cultural and religious practices:* The cultural practices of tribal people are built upon their surroundings from where they draw the resources for their survival. So, it is important to respect their traditional culture and religious practices. The existing Eco Parks are not taking this into account but the authority is continuously emphasising on preserving the colour of tribal culture as a tool to attract tourists. This proposition is not accepted to the tribal people and they do not want to be there like a “zoo animal”

### **5.3 Bringing Sustainable Development: People’s Acceptance**

The tribal peoples are scared from their past experiences to accept another commercial and recreational project. In this context, they asked the Minister concerned, while he was inaugurating an Eco Park project, about their apprehension of displacement, their restricted access to land and resources and disturbance in cultural and social lives. The Minister assured them that there would be no eviction and no restriction for the tribal people to use the resources around them. But in reality, there was substantial deviation from this assurance and while taking the decision of initiating Eco Park projects, the components were designed mostly for improving the recreational facilities and other elements of tourism and the local tribal people’s existence was ignored. Finally, the tribal peoples started protesting against the projects. The protest turned into violence as the time was passing and the government remained indifferent. However, some parts of the projects, already being implemented, were stopped for a time being to make the people forget their protest but none of these were cancelled. Besides, new projects of the same kinds are awaiting approval by the planning commission.

There is no doubt that the Eco Parks are being built to satisfy the luxurious needs of the elite class of western people and practically there is no single example of a successful case where human intervention or imposition of development projects on the nature for pursuing the economic benefit brought sustainable development. Simultaneously, the tribal people do not accept the Eco Park projects in their ancestral lands and resist against their implementation. The project planner/ authority could not or did not convince the local tribal people that these could benefit them and also benefit the environment. Previous projects had failed to benefit them anyway. That is why, these Eco Park projects in their very nascent stage are facing stiff criticism and doubts regarding their sustainability.

#### 5.4 Way Forward

*"We really need to develop our forestry policies based with participation of all quarters concerned"*- Philip Gain

It implies that local people's participation is the best solution towards ensuring sustainable development. With the current interest of only earning money from the parks and not realising its future effect on the environment and human life, the project is failing to achieve its aim of ensuring sustainable forest management. Preserving and protecting huge forest areas for building tourists spots in the name of Eco Park in a densely populated country like Bangladesh is raising the question of project's viability, as the projects tend to ignore the aspiration and need of local tribal peoples. The National Forest policy should be based on the needs and interests of the tribal people instead of pursuing the donor-driven policy objectives.

Due to the restricted access to livelihood, land and resources, participation and cultural and religious practices, the tribal people may not be able to continue their traditional way of living or practicing their traditional culture or religion. These aspects should be recognised and respected while designing the projects. Tribal people should be given alternative livelihood strategies according to their need and tradition not the other way around.

For building Eco Parks to cope with the need of growing population and to preserve the environment, some recommendations are already included in official documents which were never followed up in reality. The civil society, indigenous activists, media personnel always talk about integrating and informing tribal people in the whole process of designing and implementing Eco Park projects to ensure its success. Additionally, the authorities can learn from the experience of other countries which believe that the presence of indigenous small tribes in national parks or eco-parks adds colours and gives the project viability (Halder, 2004).

The major issue among the tribal people of Bangladesh is the land ownership problem which should be solved immediately and Ministry concerned should accelerate the process. The people should be ensured that the park will not restrict their access and hamper their cultural and religious practices. The eco tourism elements of the project

can be transferred to the Ministry of Tourism with proper guidelines and building infrastructure facilities, like hotel, motel, picnic spots.

The recommendations can also be made for the people. The tribal people should give some alternative ideas instead of trying to go against the project. Eco Parks have some positive aspects also from the environmental and economic view point. If the tribal people can come up with some positive suggestion, realising the benefit, organise in productive way, it would also be easy for the government to deal with the matter.

According to President's Council on Sustainability (1996), sustainability ultimately cannot be decided by the government for people, people will have to decide it for themselves. Eco Park related policy issues for ensuring sustainable forest management should be undertaken through participatory action research. Moreover, it is very important to do a pre-feasibility and feasibility study from the environmental and social impact of the project.

Finally, it can be said the Eco Park projects can be a good policy instrument if the Government prevent three things from taking place. One is the ecological destruction which will happen by implementing the project, the second one is loss of traditional livelihoods practices of the tribal people and third one is ignoring people's participation and concern in the project cycle. Development should meet and respect local people's needs, interests, rights, traditional practices and the indigenous knowledge should be integrated in the project components. Implementation of all these elements can ensure the balance between the three circles of Barrow's sustainable development model. Only then the Eco Park projects can be good instrument to achieve the broader policy goal of ensuring sustainable forest management in Bangladesh. According to Davey (1999), "protected areas will not survive unless they enjoy broad public support and this will not exist unless people's fundamental needs are met."



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## Annex A

### **Questionnaire:**

1. In practice, the Eco Park projects are not being implemented fully as yet. Some of the projects have just started building the fence and it is now stopped. As per the newspaper reports we know that the tribal people are protesting against the Eco Park projects at this stage. **Why the tribal people are reacting so immediately?**
2. In your opinion, **do you think Eco Park projects are good management process for forest conservation in a densely populated country like Bangladesh?**
3. **How can the forest policy be modified?** In the policy document, management process, project objectives, everywhere it is been stated that people's participation will be there; people will be benefited and can bring sustainable development. **Than what is the real problem behind it?**
4. What are the **alternative livelihood strategies** that government is offering and providing, in practice, to the tribal people who were residing inside those protected areas?

### List of Interviewees

#### *Government Officials*

1. Mr. Iklil Mondol, Conservator and Project Director, Forest Department, Ministry of Environment and Forest
2. Mr. Habibur Rahman Khan, Upazilla Nirbahi Officer (Administrative Head of a Sub-district )
3. Haroon-or- Rashid, Researcher, Forest Department, Ministry of Environment and Forest

#### *Non-Government Personnel*

1. Mr. Shanjeeb Dhrong, Secretary General of Bangladesh Forum for Indigenous People
2. Mr. Phillip Gain, Director, Society for Environment and Human Development (SEHD) SHED
3. Mr. Shahrier Khan, Chief Reporter, The Daily Star – A renowned national newspaper of Bangladesh

## **Annex B**

Currently, the number and area of existing Eco Parks and national parks are shown in the table below<sup>13</sup>.

Table: Notified Protected Areas of Bangladesh

	Names	Location	Area (ha)	Established
<b>A</b>	<b><i>National Parks</i></b>			
1	Bhawal National Park	Gazipur	5,022	1974/1982
2	Modhupur National Park	Tangail / Mymensingh	8,436	1962/1982
3	Ramsagar National Park	Dinajpur	27.75	2001
4	Himchari National Park	Cox' Bazar	1,729	1980
5	Lawachara National Park	Moulavibazar	1,250	1996
6	Kaptai National Park	Chittagong Hill Tracts	5,464	1999
7	Nijhum Dweep National Park	Noakhali	16352.23	2001
8	Medha Kassapia National Park	Cox's Bazar	395.92	2004
<b>B</b>	<b><i>Wild Life Sanctuaries</i></b>			
9	Rema-Kelenga Wildlife Sanctuary	Hobigonj	1795.54	1996
10	Char Kukri-Mukri Wildlife Sanctuary	Bhola	40	1981
11	Sundarban (East) Wildlife Sanctuary	Bagerhat	31226.94	1960/1996
12	Sundarban (West) Wildlife Sanctuary	Satkhira	71502.10	1996
13	Sundarban (South) Wildlife Sanctuary	Khulna	36970.45	1996
14	Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary	Chittagong Hill Tracts	42087	1962/1983
15	Chunati Wildlife Sanctuary	Chittagong	7761	1986
<b>C</b>	<b><i>Game Reserve</i></b>			
16	Teknaf Game Reserve	Cox's Bazar	11615	1983
<b>D</b>	<b><i>Other Conservation Sites</i></b>			
17	National Botanical Garden	Dhaka	84.21	1961
18	Baldha Garden	Dhaka	1.37	1909
19	Madhabkunda Eco-Park	Moulavibazar	265.68	2001
20	Sitakunda Botanical Garden and Eco-park	Chittagong	808	1998
21	Dulahazara Safari Parks	Cox's Bazar	600	1999
	<b>Total Protected Area</b>		243434 ha <b>2,40,000 ha (approximately)</b>	

<sup>13</sup> The table is directly copied from the official website of MoEF, Bangladesh

## Annex C

Table: The Approved Eco Park Projects in Bangladesh<sup>14</sup>

Project Title	Implementation Period	Area (acre)	Location	Objectives of the Project
Botanical Garden and Eco Park at Shitakunda, Chittagong <sup>15</sup>	1999 -2000 to 2003-2004	1996	Chandranath Hill of Sitakunda, Chittagong	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Produce, preserve and develop the Genetic pool of various indigenous &amp; exotic species through intensive management.</li> <li>ii. Raising plantation of different species of bamboo, cane, herbs &amp; medicinal plants including their maintenance.</li> <li>iii. Conservation &amp; Development of valuable &amp; rare species through their collection &amp; raising plantation.</li> <li>iv. Undertaking Bio-diversity conservation &amp; development of related activities like plantation, improvement of wildlife habitat &amp; conservation of endangered wildlife.</li> <li>v. Construction of different infrastructure for the promotion of ecotourism.</li> <li>vi. Creating research &amp; education facilities for the relevant institutions like Institute of Forestry, BFRI, Forest Academy, Chittagong and so on.</li> </ul>
Madhupur National Park Development Project <sup>16</sup>	1999 – 2000 to 2003 - 2004	3000	Madhupur, Tangail	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Extension and development of existing facilities of Madhupur National Park situated near</li> </ul>

<sup>14</sup>This paper only looked at the Eco Park project which is designed in the Sal and hill forest areas. As such the Eco Park-park projects designed in the coastal areas are out of the scope of this paper. This is important to mention that the Sundarban project has completely different components from the current Eco Park projects, so, the Sundarban project was not considered in this paper while analyzing the case.

<sup>15</sup> Source of Information is from MoEF, 2000a

<sup>16</sup> Source of Information is from MoEF, 2000b

Project Title	Implementation Period	Area (acre)	Location	Objectives of the Project
				<p>by Dhaka Capital city to increase recreational facilities.</p> <p>ii. Creation of recreational facilities along with overall environment development of the country</p> <p>iii. Aforestation of degraded Sal Forest</p> <p>iv. Aforestation upon possible fallow land.</p> <p>v. Improvement &amp; extension of existing wildlife breeding center</p> <p>vi. Conservation &amp; development of endangered wild animals &amp; plant species</p> <p>vii. Increase opportunities for eco-tourism, education and research</p>
Madhobkundo Eco Park, Borolekha, Moulovibajar <sup>17</sup>	2000 – 2001 to 2004 - 2005	634	Borolekha, Moulovibajar	<p>i. Preserve &amp; Development Madhobkundo Waterfall to attract tourists</p> <p>ii. Bio-diversity conservation</p> <p>iii. Plantation of rare and different species of trees, bamboo, cane, herbs and orchids</p> <p>iv. Maintain intensive management and water flow of the water shade area of Madhob kunda waterfall</p> <p>v. Establishment of new wildlife sanctuary</p> <p>vi. Construction of recreational and amusement facilities to attract tourists</p> <p>vii. Create Education and Research Opportunities</p>

<sup>17</sup> Source of Information is from MoEF, 2001a

Project Title	Implementation Period	Area (acre)	Location	Objectives of the Project
				viii. Development of nature and environment
Muraichora Eco Park, Kulaura, Moulovibajar <sup>18</sup>	2000 – 2001 to 2004 - 2005	834	Kulaura, Moulovibajar	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Preserve &amp; Development of Muraichora Waterfall to attract tourists</li> <li>ii. Preserve, Protection &amp; Development of existing bio-diversity and Aforestation</li> <li>iii. Bio-diversity conservation</li> <li>iv. Plantation of rare and different species of trees, bamboo, cane, herbs and orchids</li> <li>v. Maintain intensive management and water flow of the water shade area through aforestation</li> <li>vi. Maintain intensive management and water flow of the water shade area</li> </ul>
Eco Park at Madhutilla and Gazni Recreational Centre <sup>19</sup>	1999 – 2000 to 2004	Not available	Sherpur and Mymensing	<p><i>Ghazni component:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. Development &amp; expansion of the infrastructural facilities in order to make the stay, amusement, travel comfortable to the local as well as foreign tourists</li> <li>ii. Raising ornamental plantation &amp; establishment of orchid house</li> <li>iii. Bio-diversity conservation, environment development &amp; establishment of wildlife sanctuary</li> <li>iv. Create facilities for education &amp; research</li> <li>v. Create large water source for</li> </ul>

<sup>18</sup> Source of Information is from MoEF, 2001b

<sup>19</sup> Source of Information from MoEF , 2004

Project Title	Implementation Period	Area (acre)	Location	Objectives of the Project
				irrigation facilities & beautification of the area vi. Create employment opportunities through park conservation & expanding other service oriented activities vii. Conservation & exploration of the tribal culture  <i>Madhutila component</i> i. Construction of wooden rest house within the forest area comprising natural scenic beauty of Madhutila to facilitate local and foreign tourists. ii. Construction of different recreational facilities such as watchtower, spill way etc. iii. Construction of road including placement of culverts, different infra-structural development iv. Tree plantation using different species v. Bio-diversity conservation vi. Environment development vii. Develop facilities for research and education
Establishment of 5 Eco Parks and Development of Botanical Garden <sup>20</sup>	2003 – 2004 to 2005 - 2006			<i>Direct objectives</i> i. Increase of recreational and amusement facilities to entertain tourists ii. Produce, preserve and develop the genetic pool of various indigenous and exotic
Alutila Eco Park		1700	Alutila, Khagrachori	

<sup>20</sup> Source of Information from MoEF, 2003/2004a

Project Title	Implementation Period	Area (acre)	Location	Objectives of the Project
Dhanshiri National Park		50	Jhalkathi, Barishal	species through intensive management iii. Plantation of rare and endangered species of trees and plants
Ramshagor National Park, Ashura lake, Ranishagor and Shingra Park		68.54	Dinajpur	iv. Create alternative employment opportunities v. Create sanctuaries for local migratory birds
Tilagor and Borshijora Conservation Forest Eco Park		112 836.6	Sylhet Moulovibajar	vi. Protect the forests lands from illegal encroachment
Kuakata Beach Eco Park Park		not available	Potuakhali	<i>Indirect objectives</i> i. Promote tourism industry ii. Development of nature and environment iii. Prevent depletion, re-establish, protect and development of Bio-diversity iv. Encourage promotion of eco park v. Develop facilities for research and education vi. Alleviation of poverty