

Chittagong Hill Tracts: A Preliminary Study on Gender and Natural Resource Management

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) covers about nine percent of the total area of Bangladesh and accounts for slightly more than half the forestlands (SWATEE 2002). This area was originally inhabited exclusively by eleven indigenous groups; however over the years there has been substantial in-migration into the hills from the plains of Bangladesh. The area has been a scene of unrest since the colonial era; from the 1970's armed resistance to the Bangladesh government led to extensive militarisation, many deaths, and considerable displacement of the population (IISH 2001).

A major turning point in the situation came when the Awami League government signed a "Peace Accord" in 1997 with Shanti Bahini, the armed force of the indigenous people of the CHT. In addition to laying down terms for re-establishing peace, the accord recognized the indigenous people's rights to land, natural resources, culture, language, and religion. It is widely thought in Bangladesh that land-related problems have contributed to the longstanding political unrest and conflict in the CHT region (Roy, 1998; Roy, 2000; Gain, 1998; Mohsin, 1997). The Accord set out detailed provisions for strengthening the system of self-governance in the CHT, and to address some of the most urgent natural resource related problems. These included the resolution of land disputes by a Commission on Land, the transfer authority for land administration to the re-organized and strengthened hill district councils (HDC), the cancellation of leases granted to non-residents during the conflict period, the distribution of land to indigenous or tribal villagers and strengthening of customary rights. These problems still remain largely unresolved (Roy, 2000). The resolution of natural resource-related problems is deemed crucial for long-term peace in the CHT, an opinion shared by politicians and academics alike (CHT Commission, 1991). A fragile peace still holds, but tension between the indigenous people and ethnic Bengali settlers regarding land-related disputes has yet to be diffused.

This paper attempts to cast a gender perspective on the allocation and determinants of tenure regimes to natural resources in the CHT by exploring factors that have shaped and continue to shape resource use, access and control, and the challenges in negotiating spaces for use and access. Relevant points of discussion were identified through a 2 month study, of which 6 weeks were in the CHT and 2 weeks in Dhaka. Before beginning the discussion on resource use, access and control and gender, a brief discussion on the history and the people of the CHT is included as essential background information in order to provide an understanding of the political, socio-economic context in which this study takes places. This is followed by reflection on the methodological aspects of the research, which provides space for reflection and insight into how the subsequent discussions were developed – it makes evident power relations, methodological problems, and ethical issues, and emphasizes that this research is not only a product of my observations and interviews, but also a product of people's perception of me. By providing detail on various aspects of methodology I attempt to present it as a series of mutual and dialogical encounters, which involved continuous negotiation between the researcher and the researched.

ARCHIV
577.4-055.2349
T5

History

The conflict in the CHT is deeply rooted in history. Colonial and post-colonial desires to consolidate colonial rule and create a “nation-state” were pursued at the expense of the indigenous peoples of the CHT. The British, Pakistanis and the Bengalis treated the region and its peoples as mere “spoils” of the wars of “national liberation movements”. The Hill peoples’ economic, political and cultural systems were either undermined or assimilated for the sake of “nation-building” (Mohsin, 1997).

The process of “Othering” began during the British colonial period (1760-1947), when the legal and institutional bases of colonial (state) control of the Hill peoples were put in place. Two main objectives guided British policy in the CHT: a) the protection of the political, economic and military interests of the British, and b) keeping the Hill peoples segregated from the Bengalis (Mohsin, 1997). To facilitate the collection of tax and the extraction of raw materials, the British placed the administration of the CHT under a Deputy Commissioner (DC); divided the CHT into three administrative subdivisions: Rangamati, Khagrachari, and Bandarban; and divided the CHT into three Circles: the Chakma, Bohomng and Mong Circles. The position of “Circle Chiefs” was also created. The process of building the “nation-state” of Pakistan further alienated both the Bengalis and the Hill people. The first constitution of Pakistan in 1956 retained the special administrative status of the CHT as an “excluded area”. Subsequently, it turned the entire indigenous population of the CHT into second-class citizens. According to Clause 15 (1) of the Constitution, only a Muslim could hold the position of Head of the State in the Islamic of Pakistan (Choudhury, 1959, cited in Mohsin, 1997). The Constitution of 1962 changed the status of the CHT from an “excluded area” to a “tribal area”. This signaled the entry of Bengalis into the local administration. All of these undermined the indigenous socio-political institutions of the Hill peoples.

The People

The Hill Tracts are home to the country’s largest concentration of indigenous people namely the Bawn, Chak, Chakma, Khumi, Khyang, Lushai, Marma, Mru, Pankhua, Tanchangya and Tripura. Although the influences of the national development have not had uniform impact on the different peoples, they are bound together by a shared history, years of peaceful cohabitation, and a common future (Gain, 1998). There are approximately 600,000 indigenous people in the Hill Tracts although the figures by the 1991 census are slightly less, indicating a negative population growth among the indigenous people. Most of the indigenous people in the CHT profess Buddhism, followed by Hinduism, Christianity and Animism (Roy, 2000a).

Women from the indigenous groups have far more social mobility than women in the plains districts, but this does not mean that their overall situation is less marginalised than that of plains women. The workload of most rural indigenous women is extremely high, as they have to tend to the farms, look after their children, and fetch water and firewood, often from great distances. Except in the case of some Marma, indigenous women do not inherit immovable property as a right. They are also severely under-

represented in both the traditional systems and the formalized and elective regional and local government bodies, except in the case of union and municipality councils, where seats are reserved for them by law. Thus the situation of social, economic, and political disempowerment is a case for serious concern – both for Bengali and hill women (Halim, 2002).

The Research

My study in the CHT attempts to identify relevant points of discussion for natural resource management and gender issues in the hill tracts. The topic of gender has been pushed aside in the hill people's struggle for autonomy from Bangladesh. However in this region, where conflict centres on use, access and control of natural resources, the issue of gender is paramount. The role of both women and men in the management of natural resources has evolved rapidly due to the past and present social, political and economic conditions in the CHT (this is based on my observations and informal interviews collected over a 6 week period, and Halim, 2002).

My intentions in this study are not to speak for the indigenous women and men of the CHT, but merely to draw a picture of the situation as it relates to gender and NRM from my observations and informal conversations with the indigenous people of the CHT. This in the end is my story based on my experiences in the CHT.

Me, the researcher: “Are you Bengali???”

Mbilinyi argues: “our identities are not given or reducible to our origins, skin colour, or material locations. Identities or positions are the product of struggle and they represent an achieved, not an ascribed trait” (1992). The category, “insider-outsider” is a constructed one: my own multiple and shifting identities produced an interesting situation. My identity simultaneously straddled various axes of difference, including gender, age, and ethnic outsider and insider as well as the socially and professionally ascribed positions of researcher, development agent, and academic. All these differing dimensions of my positionality interacted, opposed, and contradicted each other, and shifted and changed over time in differing circumstances. They affected the way I represented my work and myself, and the meanings I associated to them. They also influenced the way people perceived me.

I found myself silencing some aspects of my identity in certain interaction and encounters, while emphasizing others – a conscious, and sometimes subconscious, strategy in the politics of representation. *For example, during field visits I silenced my Canadian identity and emphasized my Indian/Hindu background in order to decrease feelings of vulnerability. However on numerous occasions I was mistaken for Bengali, which would often cause the indigenous people to become more guarded with what they said and did. I would explain my cultural and ethnic origin and ask the participants if they would like to ask me questions in attempts to develop a comfortable setting in which people felt safe to speak with me. I found myself silencing my Indian/Hindu origin and stressing my Canadian background while in town. With increasing tensions between different religious groups in Bangladesh, I felt that maintaining a Canadian identity, in particular while speaking with government official's, provided me with a feeling of*

impartiality, maybe wrongly so. I found even though I would introduce myself as a Canadian, my ethnic and religious background were of interest to almost everyone I spoke with.

I often felt vulnerable in terms of safety. Before leaving New Delhi I was not completely aware of the safety concerns. It was not until I spoke with various University Professors, Government Officials and Indigenous Leaders in Dhaka that I realized how difficult it would be to carry out research in the CHT. I was told, as a woman of Indian/Hindu origin, and also a Canadian, it would be difficult for me to carry out research in the Hill Tracts. Many restrictions were put on my movements. I was not accustomed to moving in such small spaces and such clearly marked boundaries, and for my religious affiliations to be a central force in determining my identity and how I was perceived.

My association with an international institution put me in a more powerful position than many of the research participants and Bangladeshi colleagues. In encounters with research participants I found myself emphasizing my academic student status and de-emphasizing my institutional affiliations. I hoped this would help to prevent my perceived status from influencing their reason for participating or their responses. I also wanted to avoid raising expectations of access to material and economic resources. On the other hand when speaking with government officials, academics, and experts I found myself emphasizing my institutional affiliations to increase my chances of gaining access to information and knowledge about local issues and constraints.

Methodology

The field research is strongly rooted in qualitative methodology. The impetus for utilizing qualitative methods is that it allows for gendered accounts of everyday life. Qualitative methods enable the emergence of a range of multiple and simultaneous issues, experienced by local actors, that affect natural resource management when viewed through a gendered lens, and what meaning they give to those experiences. Personal narratives, in particular, are useful in unsettling generalizations, subverting the process of "othering" (Abu, 1999), and raising questions about how people live and experience natural resource management when viewed through a gendered lens, and what meaning they give to those experiences.

Personal narratives challenge essentializing views that are often detached from the complex and multiple realities of participants (Mies 1992; Kirkby and McKenna 1989, 164). They give local women and men opportunities and spaces to articulate their own knowledge, views, and experiences. Women and men's subjective accounts have integrity in their own right because they are located within their real and gendered life-words (Mbilinyi 1992,). They provide an opportunity for exploring realities that have been marginalized in the past, and challenge constructions of realities found in conventional approaches, there by working against narrative closure and the silencing of multiple voices (Moore and Vaughan 1994)

Reflecting on the Methodology

Feminist poststructuralist and critical anthropological approaches stress a reflexive approach. The goal is not rampant self-reflexivity as an end in itself (Harding 1987, cited in Lal 1996). Rather, the goal of self-reflexivity is to make the research process transparent, and to counter the notion of “neutral” research and knowledge production (Mbilinyi, 1992).

The research encounter is one in which actors with varying positionalities interact and create spaces for negotiation, accommodation, exchange, and transformation (Long, 1992). Although participants play an active role in the research process, there is a marked power imbalance: they lack control over many aspects of the research itself and the production of knowledge that results from it (Cotteril, 1992). Unless the research is designed accordingly, participants have no control over how it is written, how it is interpreted, and how it represents their realities. It is the researcher who, in the end walks away and controls the final interpretation of the data, no matter what form it takes.

The Process

Making the research transparent allows others to understand how the results were obtained and makes apparent power relations, gaps in methodology, and ethical issues. By providing detail on various aspects of methodology I attempt to present it as a series of mutual and dialogical encounters, which involved continuous negotiation between the researcher and the researched. This approach turns a critical eye on conventional conceptualizations of “the field” as a taken-for-granted space “where an “other” culture or society lays waiting to be observed or written” (Gupta and Ferguson, 1997). The research consisted of a series of interrelated processes and simultaneous methods with multiple linkages from one process to the other. The intention is to highlight the methods used, thereby reflecting on the research findings in an honest, and transparent manner.

My institutional affiliations with IDRC and IARD played a significant role in defining the research agenda. They also made a profound difference in reducing the level of anxiety and vulnerability associated with cross-cultural research. My research was incorporated into the Sustainable Use of Biodiversity (SUB) Program. This was based on a mutual interest in exploring local perspectives on gender and natural resource management issues through a preliminary study that would draw out entry points for other context-specific research initiatives. I was hosted by Integrated Action Research Development (IARD), as they were interested in supporting gender research, and research in the CHT. There have been very few studies done on the socio-economic environment of the CHT, and the scope of available literature is very limited, and therefore it was felt that this study might be able to add to the literature already existing.

Literature Review

Upon arrival to Bangladesh, I immediately began searching for and reviewing literature on the CHT. I quickly realized that very limited literature was available on the CHT. The literature available was often a result of large donor funded consultancies that entailed rapid assessments and surveys, or were journalistic accounts of human rights abuses in the CHT. The Chakma Chief Raja Devasish Roy has published a substantial body of work that focuses on land issues in the CHT from a political and administrative

lens, Amenia Mohsin has examined the CHT in terms of Nationhood and Hegemony, and Sakdeka Halim has recently begun work on social forestry in the CHT. I soon realized that resource tenure as it relates to gender has not been examined. Raja Devaish Roy in his writings on land rights has brought to attention the need to examine gender, specifically in research and development activities.

While in Dhaka I spoke with faculty from International Relations, Business Management, and the Sociology Department at Dhaka University and faculty from Chittagong University. The primary intention of my informal questions was to obtain a general picture of the CHT - the people, the culture, the history. I focused questions specifically on the work the interviewee had done in the CHT.

Field Research

I had initially intended to apply a variety of PRA tools to facilitate a process where information could be shared between community members and with me. I would begin with informal interviews to learn about the region in a general sense, so that I could identify constraints and develop relevant questions, and determine point of entry. However upon arrival in Dhaka, and even more so in the CHT, I quickly came to the realization that I would have to rework my field method, and simplify the research. Vandergeest (1996) suggests that we “think about property not only as rule and laws but also as ordinary everyday practices”. This approach implies that for research on resource tenure it may be useful to begin with observations of what people do, rather than questions about rules and laws. “By examining everyday resource interactions of people and communities the complexities of property become visible” (Vandergeest, 1996). This supports my choice to apply a more simplistic approach to the research, one that was based on observation and semi-structured interviews. I would learn from watching and listening.

Visiting Villages

As I was not familiar with any of the approximately 11 indigenous languages or Bengali, or even the region, I required not only an interpreter, but also someone who was familiar with the area and could guide me to villages. Due to safety concerns it was not possible for me to stay in the villages overnight. I was advised that I should be back in town by 4pm everyday. My Research Assistant and I identified villages to visit, our primary criteria being safety. We would only visit villages that were known to her, and villages that were neutral, did not have Anti-Peace Accord Parties in the vicinity. We would leave for the village about 6am every morning and return to the town by 4 pm. There are three districts in CHT; Bandarban, Rangamati and Khagrachari. My research was focused in Bandarban and Rangamati. I chose not to work in Khagrachari for two reasons: safety concerns and time constraints.

Before visiting the villages we would seek permission from the Village Karbari (Headman) or the Village Chariman. *All Village Karbaris we spoke with were willing to have us visit. Upon arrival to the village we would first visit with the karbari or headman and informally discuss the intention of my study and issues pertaining to natural resource management in the village. He would then show us around the village, which was helpful*

in providing insight into issues specific to the people of the village. We would then spend the day meeting with men and women of the village and carry out semi-structured interviews and observations. To obtain a gendered perspective it was important to learn from the experiences and opinions of both men and women from different socio-economic groups within the village. In most cases the interviews were held separately with men and women while they were carrying out their daily activities, such as working in the jum plot, in the home garden, carrying out household activities, or working in the market.

Group Discussions

Group interviews were held in village schools, and in village member's homes. I am aware that certain public spaces may inhibit participatory discussion. Mosse's (1994) article sheds light on the complexities of participation and the dynamics of space that elicit true participation. After a series of semi-structured discussions it was determined that for group's discussions to be in an open and comfortable space, in which people feel safe to speak freely, it would be best to segregate discussions by gender. Discussions with women were held in the village school or in the home of other women from the community; in a space they felt comfortable. I do realize that even having discussions that are segregated by gender and held in a place that women consider theirs does not insure that every voice will be heard. Women and men are not two homogenous groups within a community, there are many types of women and men, and they exist in many different groups (these groups can be determined by age, religion, economic status, etc). While I tried to encourage the participation of all members of the group discussion, hierarchies within the groups manifested themselves through members who seemed to be leaders, elders or outspoken. In two instances we were able to have a mixed group discussions with a family and members of the extended family. In this case I found that the young women in the family found it difficult to speak, the older women were vocal, as were the elder men.

Semi-Structured Interviews

As the aim of the study was to understand what natural resource management means for differently positioned women and men in their everyday lives, the bulk of the discussion was focused on individual semi-structured interviews. Many of the participants had not been engaged in this type of dialogue or come in contact with a foreign researcher I often found that it was difficult for people to respond to my questions. *An example of this would be when asked about the future – most often it was difficult for people to respond. It seemed that most people thought of immediate needs and the present. When I asked "how do you envision the future for your community and their family", many could not respond and in some cases people said they are waiting to die.*

The motivation behind topics as opposed to questions was to provide a space for women and men to speak to issues they felt were important within the identified topics. Since I was attempting identify important matters for the indigenous communities of the CHT – I felt it was important to facilitate discussions on issues they would identify within the topics of discussion. *An example would be in one group discussion with men I*

had started first asking them about what do they do in a day, the discussion gradually moved to drug use by indigenous people and the increased use of certain illegal substances, a phenomena they feel is attributed by the active presence of the military in the CHT.

I hoped that by identifying relevant topics of discussion, as opposed to specific questions the participants could feel that they had control of the discussion. Not all topics were discussed in the interviews, I would follow the lead of the participant and only converse about what they felt was important. *In one home – I spent more than an hour discussing the participant's daily activities, in particular her weaving. She brought out all that she had made and tried on the various pieces for us, explaining the significance of each piece.*

The topics of discussion are the following:

1. Daily activities
2. Use of Resources – what and how
3. Change in resource use over time
4. Safety
5. What would they like in the future for community and family
6. Development activities in the village (what development organizations are working in the area, and what do they do)
7. Occupation

Meeting with NGO's

Before beginning fieldwork and during the fieldwork I made time to visit most of the NGO's working in Rangamati and Bandarban, and revisiting NGO's working on issues that related to the work I was doing. Initially this was to assist in flushing out issues with respect to NRM and to learn more about the cultural and social landscape of the region, as well as current development activities, however as I built relationships with certain NGO's, and specifically with certain staff members, I would share my observations and discussions from the field with them and ask them for their opinions and input.

Sharing Session

Just before leaving the CHT I organized an informal "Sharing Session" with staff members of different NGO's in Rangamati. I would have liked to arrange "Sharing Sessions" in Bandarban and in the villages of Bandarban and Rangamati, however due to time constraints I was unable to. Before the session I identified dominant trends in the research findings, as well as questions and concerns I had with respect to major trends, the research process and the current situation in the CHT.

At the session I presented the motivation behind the research, the goals and the objectives, the methodological process, which then led into the findings, questions and concerns. The session provided a space for people to comment on my interpretation of the field and the findings, and to provide suggestions, and comments.

Resource Use, Access and Control

Resources in CHT have been discussed exclusively in terms of land and land rights. In this section I attempt to reconceptualize factors central to the controversy surrounding land use and land rights in terms of their impacts on resource use, access, control, and ultimately tenure. Resource use and tenure regimes have evolved a great deal over the last century, this section explores forces influencing tenure regimes by examining three identified determinants, customary patterns of use and management, government-sponsored development activities, and lastly the situation post-peace accord. Traditionally tenure regimes were established by customary patterns of use (two indigenous forms natural resource management integral to indigenous livelihood strategies are presented in this section - jumming and village common forests), however customary processes for resource allocation are being challenged by government sponsored development projects, which have been a dominant force in shaping resource use and access over the past 50 years, and now the social and political environment post-peace accord will add another layer and dimension in people's perception of natural resources. The analysis below presents the different systems at play, and challenges in negotiating resource use and access within these different systems.

Customary Patterns of Use

Traditionally, the hill people have never had to question their rights to the hills and forests in their area; in a formal arena they have managed the resources according to their customs and practices. In some cases, custom-based rights have been transformed into written laws or have been formally acknowledged by legislation or executive orders. However, most customary resource rights remain formally unacknowledged (Roy, 2000).

The practice of consulting the mauza (the smallest administrative unit (number of villages) for tax collection in the CHT) headmen before the natural resources of the mauzas can be utilized may be regarded as an indirect acknowledgment of the indigenous peoples' rights over the natural resources of their mauzas to the exclusion of others. The indigenous people of the rural areas, especially the mauza headmen and the karbaris are usually well acquainted with these customs and practices. As external factors begin to influence tenure regimes it is felt by many that it may be necessary to define the formal status of various customary rights for legal and administrative purposes. A test case will be the decisions of the future Commission on Land (a creation of the CHT Accord of 1997) which is to settle disputes over land while being obliged to take into account "existing rules, customs and usages of the CHT" (Tebtebba, 2000).

Mindful of the vital role that forests and other natural resources play in their own economic sustainability, the indigenous people devised mechanisms and modalities to preserve and protect their resource base according to the precepts of equity and responsibility (Gain, 1998). However as external forces such as displacement and deforestation come into play indigenous knowledge and customs are increasingly challenged. Two predominant indigenous systems of resource use and conservation I was able to learn about (there may be others that I am unaware of) have been identified

through literature review, interviews and observations: common village forests and jum agriculture.

Common Village Forests

According to customary practice, each village identified an area within its territorial and jurisdictional authority, reserved solely for use and extraction relating to domestic purposes. The forest is communally owned and managed, with the community as a whole responsible for its upkeep and conservation: jums are not allowed in these areas. Use and extraction was need-based, with each person taking only what was required, in order not to deplete the natural resources of this forest which existed for the benefit of the entire community. This area was later known as the mauza reserve or service forests with the indigenous village administration responsible for its care and upkeep (Halim and Roy, 1999). This system continues today in a few villages. In some cases it is the only remaining natural forest in the surrounding area. *I was not able to visit on common village forest as most are situated in more remote areas of the hill tracts, where there are still a few extensive tracts of forests. Common village forests were known to many of the interviewees; however they were not involved in the use and maintenance of them. My understanding of this practice is that the formally recognized guardian of the VCF forests is often the headman or village karbari, however the primary users of these forests seem to be women, as the forests are used primarily to meet household needs. The patterns of use and access are unclear, I was under the impression they vary from village to village.* A possible research project could be to examine the tenure regimes that exist and if there are overlapping regimes? Is there is gender differentiated use in these Common Village Forests of the resources and how women's pattern's of use impact men's pattern's of use and vice versa? What are the challenges of negotiating use and access with changing external factors that effect resource management patterns?

A CHT NGO - Taungya focuses its activities on protecting indigenous people's rights to use and access these forests and products from the forests. Dr. Halim (personal communication, 2002) suggests that common village forests are under threat due to a variety of causes, the primary being tenurial insecurity due to scarcity of agricultural lands, population rise, high in -migration and lack of institutional support. The long-term sustainability of the common village forests will depend on how integral common village forest's are to local communities everyday lives, and the threats to sustainability will have to be met primarily by the villagers themselves. It is believed that a crucial factor towards long-term sustenance of common village forests is formal recognition of these areas, to secure use, access and tenure regimes.

Jum

Jum cultivation is an indigenous agricultural system in the CHT, and is still considered the mainstay of the indigenous peoples economy (though I feel this point may be debatable, particularly in less remote regions of the CHT) and the central force in their identity as indigenous people of Bangladesh, despite the governments many efforts to curtail this practice (Gain, 1998). Many jumlands have been flooded by the Kaptai Dam

or have been converted to plantations and orchards, restricting jum cultivation to remote hill areas.

My feeling is that the practice of jum is declining and those that are still jumming are relying on it much less to meet their livelihood needs, due to decrease in land availability, lack of fertile soil, the increased input of labour required, and low yield. The roles of men and women within the jum field have been shifting as well; traditionally men would clear the area, and women would tend to the weeding, and harvesting (Gain, 2000). However now it seems that women are becoming increasingly involved in all aspects of jum cultivation and are often taking the lead role in agricultural activities, as men move towards daily labour in neighboring towns. This may not be the case in remote areas, I was unable to visit remote areas my assessment is only based on villages close to town, and villages that are slowly moving towards urbanization.

Traditionally jum land is owned by the village rather than an individual. The Headman is responsible for the distribution of the jum land among the village member. The size of the plot depends on the size of the family or the community. The Jumia families pay a tax to the headman to be shared by the headman, the chiefs, and the government (Gain, 2000; Roy, 1998). *My interviews and observations support these descriptions of jum to some extent; yet I also found use and access regimes with respect to jum are not as clear-cut as described in the literature. Patterns of use seemed to vary from village to village.*

I also found that people from neighboring areas could utilize areas that were not used by village members. In one village outside of Rangamati I spoke with a woman who had come from a neighboring village to jum in an area that was vacant. She had said that she noticed this area was not being used; she approached the Karbari about using the land for jum. As no one from the village was interested in jumming in this space she and her husband were given use rights for this season. It seems from talking with the Karbari and other village members that the Karbari alone made this decision. Nevertheless all village members were in agreement, if the space is not being utilized by village members than it is acceptable for this women and her family to use the area for jumming. She and her husband would pay the Karbari a tax for use of the land, which would be the same amount a member from the village would pay. Her husband would make all decisions regarding jumming (as she had said, but my observations reveal that she was in fact making all decisions regarding seed selection, planting and harvesting and was residing in the jum ghar (temporary home built on the jum plot, and used while jumming) while her husband was fishing and occasionally finding work in town). The Karbari had verified that he was not involved in seed selection and harvesting. He had clarified that what is planted in the jums is decided by the people jumming and not him. This village was located outside of Rangamati, due to the flooding by the Kaptai Dam much of the space was at water level resulting in rice being the primary crop for cultivation.

In areas where jum cultivation is still the primary source of meeting livelihood needs it is often combined with plough cultivation of cash crops such as ginger, turmeric and banana on gentler slopes. The move towards cash crops and marketable resources in the indigenous community raises many concerns. The growing market economy and increasing commercialization of agriculture may result in loss of indirect rights to resources, for junior members and people of lower status in a community, and formalizing rights of senior community members. It would be interesting to study the

introduction of cash crops to the jum cycle. What are its implications for society, culture and gender in the CHT? The practice of jumming has been cited (Gain, 1998; Mohisn, 1997; Van Schendel, 1992) to go beyond merely a livelihood strategy; it is deeply tied to the culture and traditions of the indigenous people. Many indigenous people have built their identity around jum – and call themselves jumia. How is the identity of the jumia affected by the shift to market based economies and cash crops? In the CHT my observations show that most of the seed selection and planting is carried out by women, if women are choosing to plant cash crops without the encouragement of senior community members and male household members, is the position and economic status of women in the villages increasing? I am reluctant to say yes. Many women expressed their frustrations of not being involved in formal decision making processes.

Another crop not traditionally planted in jum plots, but seems to have become quite popular in the recent years is teak (to be sold upon maturity). What I am unable to decipher is the system around the cultivation of teak within jum plots? Homesteads are permanent, but jum plots change from year to year. However teak does not mature in one season, it requires years before it can be harvested. If jum land is not private, and only for use in one season, and then can be used again after a fallow period that is now between 2-3 years (traditionally the fallow period was 15 years) how and when are teak harvested – is there an informal understanding with regards to teak ownership, and who in the household makes the decision regarding teak- is it encouraged by the Karbari, are the seeds given to men in the market place or to women? The shift to planting teak in jum plots leads to questions about access to jum plots, privatization, and equity benefits from jum products and suggests that this may need to be considered in the face of increasing interest and support given to agro-forestry programs. Many of the indigenous people I spoke with in the CHT supported the introduction of cash crops in their jum fields, however as I have alluded to in the previous paragraph, there are many implications to cash crops on tenure regimes, cultural practices around agriculture, social dynamics and gender relations within the community. When I asked people planting cash crops, both men and women in the villages about the positives and negatives, they felt that the positives of introducing cash crops outweighed the negatives. However I feel that in depth interviews and observations may reveal something to the contrary. I am under the impression that there are underlying tensions regarding the introduction of cash crops and it is difficult to draw them out in such a short preliminary study.

It seems that jum cultivation will continue, however the use and access patterns associated with this practice will continue to transform as women become increasingly visible in jum fields, as other agricultural systems (such as home gardens, plantation and orchards) are introduced, as the land available for jumming decreases, as the people's priorities shift from subsistence to market oriented agriculture, and as the culture evolves due to constant influxes of new social and economic determinants.

Privatization of Common Spaces

The people of the CHT are showing more interest in marketisation and privatization in order to secure their livelihoods. Consequently, more and more hitherto swidden and forest commons are being converted into homesteads and family-owned orchards and plantations. However those who, for whatever reason, cannot obtain private

plot are now deprived of access to former commons. Similarly, some areas of the Karnaphuli reservoir near Rangamati have been leased out to non-resident entrepreneurs, causing conflict with local people who used the area for fishing and for navigating their canoes and boats to and from the market. This is also a trend that could adversely affect the resource rights of the relatively poor. Just as important is the fact that privately registered farm areas are also being sold more frequently. On one hand this is helping local farmers liquidate their assets and raise the so-far elusive capital for their farming and other ventures. On the other hand, economically poor farmers are pressured to sell their land at prices dictated by the few cash buyers. Furthermore, communities living in the more inaccessible uplands and highlands do not share the same motivation for becoming registered owners of their land, which as yet has little market value.

These people's tenure is rather precarious. Unless affirmative action is taken to safeguard the interests of these remote communities and other disadvantaged sections of the rural population, the rising inequities could spell further unrest and hinder development needs. However when considering formalizing resource rights through privatization it is important to realize that both customary and formal systems can accommodate short-term changes and opportunities. Customary systems usually regulate access to resources according to membership in a lineage, community, or household (Shipton, 1989). These systems operate most effectively when resource is relatively abundant and most resource user's know one another and have regular and direct contact (Ostrom, 1990). Formal systems are most effective where resource values are high and resource transactions among strangers are frequent requiring transparency and public records to reduce information asymmetries (Grigsby, 1996). However often codification of customary rights has strengthened and concentrated resource rights of individual, senior male household heads over other interests, resulting in a small percentage of the population having resource rights and undermining the rights of minority groups within a community, such as women and junior members of a community. A combination of measures such as preventing the privatization of selected swidden, grazing, and fishing commons could at least partially address the problems of people without access to resources.

Government Supported Policies and Development Activities

Various policies and programmes have been implemented in the CHT from the time of the first colonial power and the present national administration. The thrust of these policies and programs has been to strengthen overall national development. One feature common to all policies directed towards the Hill Tracts, in the past and present, is consistent disregard for the indigenous peoples, their value systems and traditional knowledge. Three government sponsor initiatives from which a great deal of the social, economic and cultural transformation has resulted are the forest policy, the hydroelectric project – Kaptai Dam, and the resettlement program.

Forest Policy

The Concept of Government Forests

The first external administration in the Hill Tracts, the British, initiated a procedure between 1875 and 1882 whereby the forests and their resources were declared off-limits to the indigenous people, simply by declaring forests as “reserve forests” (by notification, order or other executive’s decision). The indigenous peoples no longer had any rights to these forests, which became the sole property of Government. This forest policy was adhered to by successive governments, and in the 1960’s another concept, that of “protected forest”, was introduced (Gain, 1998). This system of forest regulation continues to be in force, there are at present three categories of forest in the CHT as per national legislation:

1. Reserve Forests
2. Protected Forests
3. Unclassed State Forest/ Service Forests

Once an area is designated as a government forest, it falls under the supervisory jurisdiction of the Forest Department, which monitors compliance for the relevant rules and regulations within that area. Indigenous people are prohibited from enjoying their customary rights to jumming, hunting and gathering in the Reserve Forests and can do so in a restricted manner within the Protected Forests (Roy, 1998).

Unclassed State Forests are those areas which are not under the domain of either Reserve or Protected forests. However, what successive administrations classify as Unclassed/Service State Forest are the common lands of indigenous peoples, within the mauza areas. It is the headman who regulates the use, extraction and rotation of the jum areas. Traditionally, the indigenous people had the unfretted right to these lands (Roy, 1998).

Impact of State Forest Policies

The forestry policy implemented in the CHT highlights a systematic pattern of violations of the traditional resource rights of indigenous peoples. The majority of the indigenous people, many of whom are engaged in subsistence-based activities, are dependent on the forests and their produce for their economic well-being. The national afforestation policy has thus had a major impact on the basic social, cultural and economic rights of the indigenous peoples.

As can be assessed from available literature, interviews and observations the procedure for creating Reserve Forests includes a concomitant loss of accessible natural spaces and related resource rights for the hill people. With each successive administration the indigenous people of the CHT have seen their traditional rights to natural resources being steadily converted into national forests under juridical regimes in which no consideration is given to their needs, or existing customary patterns of use and access to forests and other resources. Many of these rights are recognized in Regulation 1 of 1900, such as the right to cut sun grass, the right to homestead land, the right to jum, and to graze cattle.

No compensation was paid to the indigenous people for the loss of their traditional resources although relevant case law indicates that it is illegal to establish a Reserved Forest on spaces for which rent has been paid. Many of the resources claimed

in within the Reserve Forests are jum lands, for which the indigenous farmers pay an annual tax. Yet once the notification of the decision to create a government forest is published, steps are taken to establish it including the removal of the indigenous people from their lands and ceasing the use of natural resources required to meet subsistence strategies. There has been a considerable decrease in the area of natural resources remaining open and accessible to indigenous people to eke out a living. The public notification of a forest area as reserved effectively displaces the indigenous inhabitants living within the area. As recently as 1992 the decision to create another "Reserved Forest" met with strong criticism both locally and internationally, in particular regarding the displacement of people living within the area (Roy, 1998).

Within the Reserve Forests any use or extraction of forest produce is prohibited, while within the Protected Forests such activities are restricted, except in the case of the Forest Department, who can sell the produce or market it after processing. The majority of the indigenous people are subsistence farmers, engaged in subsidiary hunting and gathering of forest products, their principal source of livelihood is the use of natural resources. With no measures taken or envisaged to facilitate a transition to a market oriented economy, the indigenous farmers are experiencing difficulties in seeking alternative avenues for income generation. If the present policy of converting the communally owned forests of the Hill Tracts into extraction areas for the government's sole use and enrichment continues, the economic destruction of the indigenous people is inevitable.

Although the use of and extraction from the forest and its resources is prohibited in the Reserve Forests, and is in fact penalized, the indigenous people have no alternative but to enter these forests for use and extraction to meet their domestic requirements, and in some cases for commercial purposes too. In 1976 an Asian Development Bank – funded study on the CHT forests estimated that 65% of the Reinkhyong Reserve had been destroyed by jumias coming into the area: "they have been forced to do so because of the reduced jum cycle and increased pressure for land in the Unclassed State Forest" (Roy, 2000). However I found that only in a few cases did people speak of using reserve forests for resources (this may be because most of the villages I was visiting were not near reserve forests). *The interviewees who had said that they were sometimes compelled to use the reserve forests qualified this statement by adding that this was because they felt they had no other choice; they were in desperate need of resources to meet household requirements. From interviews it seemed that women were more inclined to use reserve forests, as their first priority is to meet household needs, the men replied that they do not use reserve forests. The interviewees stress that when people become desperate they have no other choice then to take the risk that comes with entering the reserve forests and cutting down trees.*

As a matter of general practice, there are no measures available to allocate alternative natural resources to the displaced families. As a result of this practice of creating government forests, hundreds of indigenous people have been, and still are, internally displaced. With little or no access to the forests and their resources, many indigenous people are now homeless, in addition to having no resource base for their economic activities. Many of the internally displaced people are among the indigent members of society, with a standard of living well below the poverty line, even by local standards.

More than half of the people and families I interviewed are internally displaced, they are living on marginal resources, and in tightly clustered villages due to lack of space. When I would ask about the changes seen in their lifetime, many replied there are very few natural resources available to meet livelihood requirements, they left their natal villages in hopes of finding an area where they were able to jum or build a homestead.

The Hydro Electric Project (1953-1963)

A hydroelectric power plant was constructed in the CHT between 1959 and 1963. The Karnaphuli River was dammed and the reservoir it created occupied some 256 square miles. The dam submerged 54,000 acres of agricultural land in the CHT – which amounted to approximately 40% of land suitable for plough cultivation. These lands formed the majority of the rice-fields in the area. In addition to the material damage of losing their farms and their homes, the dams displaced more than 100,000 indigenous people who were forced to evacuate the designated area. As a result of the loss of their ancestral lands, some 40,000 Chakmas migrated to Arunachal Pradesh in India and remain stateless up to this day (Tebetba, 2000).

Impact on Resource Use and Access

Government sponsored development activities such as the Kaptai Dam had many degrading effects on the original structure of resource use, access, and rights. However the change in the natural and social landscape due to such activities in the region has opened up new layers of resource rights, and has added another dimension to an already complex pattern of resource tenure.

Much of the area in and around Rangamati was flooded by the Kaptai Dam. While in Rangamati I had the opportunity to visit villages that had been affected by the dam, and meet with people living in these villages. I must say that the conditions of these villages are dire. Many of the people living in these villages in the past were rice cultivators; however their fields have been submerged as a result of the flooding. In the dry season the water level decreases marginally and some are able to cultivate a very small amount of rice, however in most cases people living in around these areas have stopped cultivating rice. Almost all the people in these villages have also stopped jumming as the area available for jum has decreased, and spaces that do exist are inaccessible. Many of the men in these villages rely on fishing and occasional labour work available in town. This also implies that most of the agricultural work is now left to women in the community. It would be interesting to examine what new spaces for negotiation are created as men leave the fields and migrate to towns. The migration of men to urban areas has diversified women's roles and responsibilities in fields and in the household – has this created opportunity for women in informal or formal venues?

The increased number of lakes due to the flooding has opened up new spaces for use – primarily for fishing. *Every morning I would watch the fisherman head out, most often the boats that go out into central portion of the lake belong to Bengali fisherman, however in areas close to villages (the Bengali population in Rangamati is concentrated in town and the indigenous on small islands created by the floods in outlying areas of Rangamati) the indigenous people have set up fish nurseries.* New natural spaces have been created by the Kaptai Dam, the associated tenure regimes to these spaces, how they

are determined and negotiated between the various user groups may be an interesting area to explore. Are they influenced by existing patterns?

Landlessness has often been attributed to forest policies, the dam and the settlement program. The pattern of resource use and access by the landless is unclear and has left me with more questions. *I was able to interview many villagers who were landless. All were still reliant on agriculture to some extent. They worked on other people's plot of land. When asked about the methods of management, there were many different responses. Some had said they are paid in cash for the work they do on other lands. Some had said that they use the land to plant seeds they have selected and then give a portion of the harvest to the landowner, there is no fixed amount, this is negotiated between the landowner and the landless. Some replied that they plant what the landowner requests, and they keep a portion of what they have planted.* However, what are the gender implications to this, how does planting cash crops as opposed to agriculture for subsistence affect the relationship between landless and landowners? Are the landless given access to other areas within the landowner's boundaries – bamboo for home construction, grass for roofs or firewood?

Another interesting phenomenon that the landless and displaced people of Rangamati are engaged in is the production of rice wine to sell in the local market. Rice wine production and consumption is an element of indigenous culture, however in the past rice wine was prepared at home for community and family members, not for selling the market. *In the villages I was visiting people were very reluctant to talk about wine production. However through a series of interviews it became apparent that wine was being produced. Wine production was being carried out by almost every female family member in the area, and then taken to the market to sell. The rice needed for wine production was purchased at the market.* It has also been cited (Tebtebba, 2000) that there is a marked increase in the use of alcohol and drugs within the indigenous community “we now fear our own men” (quote in Tebtebba, 2000). Perhaps exploring non-traditional market activities in the indigenous communities and their impact on the traditional values and norms may shed light on the effects of urbanization and “modernization” of indigenous communities?

A final response to the changing physical and socio-economic environment that I observed is an increasing trend towards urbanization. *In one of the first villages I visited outside of Rangamati, almost all the people I met with had stopped jumming. All maintained a home garden for fruits and vegetables to be used in the home. Most of the men worked in town and almost all the women were extensively involved in textile production to be sold in the market. The village seemed to be relatively affluent and their reliance on natural resources was minimal (in comparison to the other villages I had the opportunity to visit).* However I wonder what the effects of urbanization of rural areas are on resource tenure and on a culture that is supposedly heavily embedded in the use and management of natural resources – some refer to themselves as jumia?

Population Transfer Program

In 1979, the President of Bangladesh, Ziaur Rehman convened a meeting of high level officials including the Deputy Prime Minister, the Home Minister, the Commissioner of Chittagong, and the Deputy Commissioner of the CHT. The objective

was to formulate a program of population transfer to relocate families from the plain areas of Bangladesh to the Hill Tracts. An allocation of 60 million takas (the national currency) was earmarked for the program, and special committees established for its implementation (Mohsin, 1997). In order to encourage the plains families to move to the CHT, various incentives in cash and kind were offered. The official rationale for the Settlement Program was overcrowding in the plains and that there was land to spare in the Hill Tracts. This misconception of enormous amounts of available land in the CHT was contrary to official information (Mohsin, 1997).

There was a gradual increase of non-indigenous people into the Hill Tracts through the years, but in 1981, when the settlement program was underway, a dramatic shift in the demographic composition of the area is noticeable. It is important to take into consideration that in 1947, when the Indian sub-continent was partitioned, indigenous people constituted over 92% of the total population in the CHT; in 1971 when Bangladesh was created they made up nearly 75%; whereas in 1991 they made up only 51.4% of the total population (Mohsin, 1997). Although the Government claims to have halted the settlement program, unofficial sources indicate that families from the plains continue to relocate to the Hill Tracts.

Impact Resource Rights

The impact of the settlement program on the resource rights of indigenous people was far-reaching, and problematic; a major factor contributing to the prevailing unrest in the CHT. Allocation of natural spaces and resources for settler's families was given the highest priority, and in 1979 survey officials were observed measuring space, including that occupied by the hill people. With the settlement program underway, the Government had to find an immediate solution to the lack of available space. As an initial measure, a portion of the Kassalong Reserve Forest near the confluence of the Maini and Kassalong Rivers was "de-reserved" and settled in their favor. However, this was far less than the amount of area needed, which was between 460,000 to 920,000 acres (Roy, 2000). The Government undertook certain measure to bridge this gap, providing settler families with areas belonging to indigenous people. Many of the areas allocated were illegal, as the specified areas were already registered in the names of indigenous people, or were under their occupation and cultivation. The transfer of thousands of landless settler families from the plains to the Hill Tracts and the allocation of areas in their names infringed both the private and the customary rights of the indigenous peoples (Roy, 2000). The settlement program violated their customary rights to their paddy lands and jums. Access to fringe areas, hillsides, fruit and vegetable gardens and plough lands was drastically curtailed. In addition, their customary rights to graze cattle cut sun grass, and to build a homestead in non-urban areas were also jeopardized (Gain, 1998). The displacement as a result of the influx of people from the plain land resulted in both internal and external displacement of indigenous people. The internally displaced as a result were landless in the CHT, and the externally left for NE India – Aurnchal Pradesh and Tripura, and are living as stateless refugees even now (The CHT Commission, 1991; Roy, 2000). The internal displaced are living in meek conditions often working as daily labourers or on other peoples lands. Many people have lost access and customary use rights to the resources they once used freely and disputes are yet to be settled. In the meantime the

indigenous people are trying to carve out alternative livelihood strategies, one such example is the production of rice wine (discussed in the previous section).

The ensuing tension between the indigenous people, and the settler communities erupted in violent incidents including rape, torture, and mass killings. The hostility between the indigenous people and the settlers lead the Government of Bangladesh to believe that it was necessary to establish a military presence in the CHT (The CHT Commission, 1991). The violence between the military and the indigenous people, and the settler's and the indigenous people have had a definite impact on people's feeling of security and their access and use of natural resources. *Women and men talked about military raids in villages, which would force the indigenous people to flee into the forest and hide for days and even weeks. People spoke of the military coming into their homes demanding meals, helping themselves to whatever was in the home garden, and cutting down trees that the village people were maintaining for domestic purposes. Many women spoke of the safety concerns they had when working in the field. Both men and women's movements were restricted, however resources need to survive were further and further away. The people I spoke with say that the violence has decreased, and they feel that they have more mobility, however they pointed out that the situation varies from area to area and in remote regions there is still violence and assault by the military.*

Post Accord

High population growth, decreased access to lands due to the Kapati Dam and government forestry programmes, educational progress and growing integration with the market economy of the plains – and consequently the global economic system – is inducing far reaching occupational changes within indigenous society. Men living in villages close to town have taken to daily labour. Families rely less and less on jum cultivation to meet their subsistence needs. Indigenous communities are now also turning to fishing, typically a Bengali activity, now with such vast areas covered by water and plough land submerged; men are now engaged in fishing. However with indigenous men moving into occupations that are traditionally occupied by Bengali men, there is increasing hostility. Ownership and tenure regimes continued to be challenged, but now in a there is another dimension – water tenure and urban employment activities. The devastation resulting from government programmes and policies have left people little choice other than to rely on alternate subsistence strategies.

A growing section of the indigenous population has now taken to non-traditional economic activities such as sedentary agriculture with irrigation and mechanized and non-mechanized ploughing, market-oriented fruit and tree plantations, trading, fishing and other vocations, including private and government jobs. There is a strong shift towards market-oriented occupations and increased instances of multiple-occupation patterns, a trend that is more than likely to continue in an accelerated manner in the near future (Roy, 2000). However even though the push towards marketable activities is gaining momentum, there are very few options and spaces to develop marketing facilities. Marketing textiles made by indigenous women has been one strategy, however there are limits to this, there is more supply than demand, and only a limited number of women in the CHT are able to access this opportunity. Tourism is also being considered as an

option – however there are many socio-economic and cultural implications to this, as one can imagine.

In the post accord environment there has also been an increasing push towards privatization of natural resources and natural spaces. Though privatization may legitimize resource rights of indigenous people, it further marginalize groups within this community by taking away their indirect and often invisible rights to natural resources. Often it is the senior members that benefit from such actions. *I was able to already see disparities within the indigenous communities. In one community I visited I met with the chairmen (in most of the villages I visited I was not able to meet anyone more senior than the Karbari), this was the first and only chance I had to speak with, and observe the lifestyle of a Chairman. This village was quite badly off in comparison to many of the other villages. Those who did have home gardens, were only able to maintain a very small one, very few had access to jum fields, or other natural resources. However the Chairman was quite well off. He had benefited from the privatization of land and natural resources. He had orchards, a large homestead, a home garden and a fishing boat - all private property, and for all he had documents showing that he was indeed the owner.* The disparities created by privatization of use, access and rights to resources and natural spaces are very obvious in the CHT, and will only increase if the side effects of privatization are not considered more realistically. How does privatization affect the informal use and access of natural resources by people whose use is invisible - such as those who are of lower economic status, are landless, or are women (it may be necessary to first formally recognize that women are using the natural spaces before this question can be addressed with any basis)? It is also important to note that in the indigenous community there are many overlapping tenure regimes – how will plans for privatization take this into account? How do these new forms of using natural spaces such as plantations, fishing and orchards fit into the picture? How does privatization effect a culture and a society built around collective use rights - does it create a sub-culture, resulting in discrimination and hostilities?

Gender and CHT

Gender issues have not been directly addressed in the 1997 Peace Accord. Nonetheless some feel that the importance of gender equity has been addressed in an indirect manner, by providing a number of “reserved” seats for women in the District Council and Regional Council. However these measures are not adequate to protect the economic, social and political rights of women from different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Unless and until women are able to achieve real empowerment politically, socially and economically, their marginalised situation is bound to continue. This section explores the gendered nature of resource use, access and control.

Use, Access and Control – Gendered Spaces??

It is only relatively recently that gender roles in resource use, access, and control have been explored in academic literature and research, and in the CHT, gender as it relates to natural resource management, and use have never been directly examined. Current literature on gender and resource use has shed light on the complexities of natural

resource management, and its multi-dimensional character. Rocheleau and Edmunds (1997) research in particular has had a strong focus on how spaces can be gendered, and how gendering can change over time. Although men frequently gain formal access to land and land titling programs, women often have informal access to other, “in between” spaces.

In the past the use and access of resources may have fit into the gendered niches that Rocheleau explores in her research. Research on jum cultivation (Gain, 1998; Roy, 2000) highlights that in the past women and men had distinct roles in the field and often occupied different natural spaces within the same area. However there are now different and increasing number of factors affecting the use of these spaces and their gendered nature. Over the years women and men’s use of natural spaces have transformed quite rapidly. The shifts in roles and spaces occupied have been attributed primarily to two main factors: military presence in the CHT, and a decrease in resources (due to the dam, and the settlement programs, policies that are not appropriate and do not protect resource rights of inhabitants). To shed light on the topic of gender in the CHT, I attempt to identify factors that have affected gender roles in the CHT, and how this is played out in village communities. I explore two key points of discussion with respect to gender and natural resource management, both of which were identified through interviews with indigenous men and women - the role of men and women in decision making processes, and the indigenous patterns of inheritance.

Decision Making Process

Indigenous women have traditionally been more mobile and have had larger boundaries to move in as opposed to their counterparts – Bengali women residing in the CHT, however mobility and vague boundaries have often been wrongly interpreted as equality in decision-making processes and in the division of labour. Through literature based research prior to arriving in the CHT, and initial interviews with NGO’s, and hill people, it was quickly established that women and men have been subjected to a great deal of change and upheaval in terms of resource use and access. The military presence in the CHT is a very obvious factor affecting natural resource use and management. Both men and women were subjected to gross human rights abuses, which have been cited in “Life is not Ours”(1991). The indigenous people have been forced to live within tight boundaries and limited spaces to protect themselves from interrogation – this has had huge impacts on people access to resources, their sense of security, and ability to meet livelihood needs. Many men and women in the village have stated the restriction in their movements and fear of persecution by the military has caused a marked change in their patterns of use. With men becoming increasingly involved in the political situation of the CHT, women have had to diversify their roles in the home, community and market place. Women not only carry out household activities, they are active in agriculture and market based economies. They have taken a lead role in working in the jum fields, maintaining home gardens and selling produce in the market place, however they face a great deal of harassment and backlash from the Bengali settlers.

“I go to the market every Wednesday to sell my vegetables from the Bhagan (home garden), I am often harassed by the Bengali business owners and they will not buy

my vegetable for a fair price. They buy them from me at a very low price and sell them at a much higher rate”

“In the past women had to deal with much harassment both verbal and physical when going to the market to sell and buy vegetables, we need passes that would allow us to move around the market place, and were often subjected to frequent police checks”.

“There is still a great deal of hostility between tribal (indigenous) people and Bengali settlers – they are still taking advantage of us”

Although indigenous women’s boundaries are increasing within their community, the rights and privileges associated this increased mobility, and available to men in the indigenous community are not always accessible and granted to women. *In many interviews with men and women it was reported that in most cases men and women work side by side in fields. When asked who determines what is planted in the fields it was difficult to assess, women would respond “My husband” and in few cases they said “Me”. However through observations and group discussions it was clear that women often decide what will be planted, and more so in the case of home gardens. What I predict is happening is that women are often saying that men are making decisions regarding natural resource management to protect their (the women’s) indirect rights to resources. By maintaining that men are the primary users and decision makers perhaps they feel their use of resource is much more secure then if they were to say they were making most decisions regarding seed selection, planting and harvesting. They are therefore able to protect their indirect rights to the resources and protect the informal, and often invisible decision-making process they are accustomed to. However in some instances women were vocalizing their desire to become a part of the formal decision-making process as the primary users and managers of natural resources.*

There were many interviews that revealed women’s increased desire to participate in formal decision-making processes at the community/village level, and less interest at the district and regional level. Many felt that their diverse role in the community had yet to be recognized formally. It was first through informal interviews that this became apparent, this was later confirmed through a series of group decisions with women from villages in both Rangamati and Bandarban. It was evident that women preferred to speak in the company of women. One woman in particular had said (when I had asked how they felt about groups discussion that were mixed, with men and women) – “it is impossible to speak freely in the presence of men.....we can discuss together but ultimately the man is the head of the household and will make all final decisions”. In terms of natural resource management I found this to be disconcerting, it was evident that women were the primary caretakers and managers of natural resources, and also the most visible in the market place selling vegetables. The lack of women’s active involvement in decision-making processes regarding the management of natural resources, but also in other social process – such as education, sanitation and health, may mean that a whole body of knowledge and experience is being ignored, which may lead to mismanagement and the development of inappropriate facilities and modes of governance.

In one discussion with women from a village outside of Bandarban, and which was followed by a discussion with I was able to ask questions that would shed light on women’s opinions and views about their current position within the community. The head of the household were a part of a Samiti (group developed around a certain activity);

because the heads of households were requested to join the Samiti was formed exclusively by the males of the village. I was able to interview the men of this village and then I asked if I could speak with the women from the village explaining that I would be asking the similar questions to the women.

I asked women if they would like to join the Samiti, they had said they would very much like to be a part of the Samiti. I then asked them if they would like to be in a Samiti that was formed of both men and women from the village. All the women responded "No". They wanted to be a part of a Samiti that was exclusively women. I asked "Why?"

"If we are in a group with men, ultimately men will make all the decisions and will have no say over what we do with the money allotted to us. If we are only women, we will be able to decide and help each other manage our funds".

Perhaps future research and development can explore possible entry points to develop spaces for women in formal decision-making processes dominated primarily by village elders and men? What would be the most appropriate culturally? How do women perceive their role in formal community level decision-making processes, and how do they think they can be more involved in formal processes? How do men feel women can be more actively in decision-making process? Would examining the decision-making process at a village level benefit the management of natural resources, would it create gender equity?

What I can infer from observations is that there may be many layers in the way women and men are involved in the decision making process at the village level. In the public and formal settings men are the visible decision makers and women may support this to maintain their place in the informal decision-making processes. I firmly believe to address some of the pressing issues with natural resource management, it may be necessary to explore the process that a group uses to make decisions. How inclusionary or exclusionary are they and how does this effect the use and management of resources, and the status and welfare of different groups within a community? How can access to decision-making processes be facilitated?

Inheritance

Himawanti, a NGO in the CHT based in Rangamati, works to promote solidarity amongst grassroots women so that they will enhance their participation in decision-making processes and obtain full access to the natural resources. Himawanti has identified inheritance as an important issue to target in order to improve the position of indigenous women within CHT, and to insure the equitable distribution of resources. *However when I asked women what they felt were important issues to them and other women in the CHT, no one mentioned inheritance. There was also some confusion between men and women on this issue, and what was considered inheritable. In the literature it states that from the 11 indigenous groups in the CHT only within the Marma group are women able to inherit property (1/16th of total property available). However I found that in many villages Marma and non-Marma, there were many contradictions between women and men's realities. When I asked questions about patterns of inheritance in a group discussion with members of a Chakma village outside of Bandarban, men had said that women are not entitled to property of any sorts. I asked them if they felt that their wives, daughters or sisters should inherit property – they promptly replied yes, my*

next question “Why do you feel that women should inherit property?” was difficult to answer. I repeated “You have said that you feel women should inherit property – but why do you feel women should inherit property- how would they benefit”. Finally the men replied in actuality they did not feel that women should inherit property. “If women from the indigenous community marry Bengali man then property would go to him and there would then be less land in the hands of indigenous people”. In the surrounding area some land had been sold to Bengali settlers, there was a great deal of hostility, and feelings of vulnerability were high. When I asked the women of this community if they felt that they should inherit property they had replied that they do, that within their customary rights and regimes they were entitled to property”. I was a bit confused at this point – as the men had said women are not entitled to property, and they felt that women should not inherit property. When I expressed my confusion women had replied that the men are mistaken and that they did indeed have property. Property is a socially constructed term and meanings associated may differ by gender, class, age, etc., there may also be multiple meanings attached to the term. Himawanti has termed property as rights to land, and has stated that for women to be empowered they must have formal inheritance to land. Perhaps to women in the indigenous community property extends beyond land. They may be more concerned with the use and management of resources, and inheritance of rights to resources, as opposed to the actual area of land.

In the CHT where resources are acquired, used and controlled by a series of overlapping customary regimes, and people are continually subjected to unpredictable and uncertain political and social situations it may be in the interest of women to have formal rights to land. However a study on the implications of formalizing customary rights and access may shed light to the benefits and downfalls to such an initiative.

Conclusion

Since the signing of the Peace Accord of 1997, a number of major developments on issues surrounding natural resource management, use, and tenure seem more likely. The Commission on Land may not be able to adequately address, resolve and create new spaces and options for an issue that is multi-dimensional and exists beyond the scope of land possession. The acceleration of the privatization of resources in the CHT, which will most likely exclude a majority of the indigenous population, is certain to continue. Deforestation and displacement of indigenous people are pressing issues and continue to influence use and management of resources. These developments may hamper the post-Accord process of rehabilitation, and deepen the ecological crisis that has been accelerated by the Kaptai Dam, endemic deforestation, and the unsuitable plantation and cultivation patterns of recent years. More importantly, they may well fuel further political unrest.

The topic of natural resource management in the CHT is complex, multi-dimensional, and incredibly political. It is viewed by many that a comprehensive policy regarding resource rights, may ensure equitable and environmentally sound resource use practices. It has been cited that policy requires proper implementation that takes into account the diversity of people, and overlapping issues (Roy, 2000a). However there are many layers to the issues in the CHT, appropriate identification of important issues with respect to resource allocation, management and rights from a gender perspective is

necessary before developing policy and implementing it. Perhaps this study can assist those interested in the CHT to develop questions that are relevant around issues of tenure, governance, institutional development and natural resource management. However I must caveat this by saying the situation in the CHT is continually evolving, this study only examines a few issues by no means all that exist, and it is placed in a certain time frame and context.

Literature Cited

- Abu, L. 1993. *Writing Women's Worlds: Bedouin Stories*. Berkeley and Los Angeles University of California Press.
- Cotterill, P. 1992. Interviewing Women: Issues of Friendship, Vulnerability, and Power. *Women's Studies International Forum*. 15(5/6).
- Chittagong Hill Tracts Commission. 1991. *Life is Not Ours: Land and Human Rights in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*. Amsterdam, Copenhagen: CHT Commission.
- De Vries, 1992. A research Journey: On Actors, Concepts and the Text. *In* Long, N (ed). *Battlefields of Knowledge: The Interlocking Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*. Routledge, London.
- Gain., P. 2000. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: Life and Nature at Risk*. Dhaka: SHED
- Gain, P. 1998. *Bangladesh: Land, Forest, and Forest People*. Dhaka: SHED
- Grigsby, W.J. 1996. Women, Descent, and Tenure Succession among the Bambara of West Africa: A changing Landscape. *Human Organization*. 55(1):93-98.
- Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. 1997. Culture, Power, Place: Ethnography at the End of an Era. *In* Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (ed). *Culture, Power, and Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. Duke University Press, Durham, NC
- Halim, S. 2002. Human Rights and Indigenous Women: A Case Study from the CHT. *In* State of Human Rights: Women's Perspective. Dhaka: Women for Women
- IISH. 2001. International Institute of Social History website. URL: www.iisg.nl/archives/gias
- Kirby. S.L. and McKenna, K. 1989. *Experience, Research, Social Science: Methods from the Margins*. Toronto: Garamond Press
- Lal, J. 1996. Situating Locations: The Politics of Self, Identity, and "Other" in Living and Writing the Text. *In* Wold, D. (ed). *Feminist Dilemmas in Field Work*, Westview, Boulder.
- Long, N. 1992. From Paradigm Regained? The Case for an Actor-oriented Sociology of Development. *In* Long, N (ed). *Battlefields of Knowledge: The Interlocking Theory and Practice in Social Research and Development*. Routledge, London.
- Mbilinyi, M. 1992. Gender Methodologies in Gender Issues. *In* R. Meena, (ed). *Gender in Southern Africa: Conceptual and Theoretical Issues*. SAPES Books

- Mies, M. 1991 Women's Reserch or Feminsit Research? The Debate Surrounding Feminist Science and Methodlogy. *In* Fonow, M.M; Cook, J.A. (ed). *Beyond Methodology: Feminist Scholarship as Lived Research*. Indiana University Press, Bloomington.
- Mohsin,A. 1997. *The Politics of Nationalism: A study of the CHT*. Dhaka: United Press Limited
- Moore,S.F. and Vaughan, M. 1994. *Cutting Down Trees: Gender, Nutrition, and Agricultural Change in the Northern Province of Zambia*. Hienemann and London, James Currey Ltd.
- Ostrom, E. 1990. *Governing the Commons*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Roy R.D. and Halim, S. 2001. *Protecting the Village Commons in Forestry: A Case from the Chittagong Hill Tracts*". *In* Chodhury, Q.I. (ed) *Chittagong Hill Tracts: State of Environemnt*. Dhaka: Forum of Environmental Journalists of Bangladesh (FEJB).
- Roy, R.D. 1998 *Land Rights, Land Use and Indigenous Peoples in Chittagong Hill Tracts*. *In* Gain (ed) *Bangladesh: Land, Forest and Forest People*. Dhaka: SHED
- Roy , R.C, 2000. *Land Rights of the Indigenous Peoples of The Chittagong Hill Tracts, Bangladesh*. IWGIA: Copenhagen, Denmark
- SAWTEE. 2002. *Mountain Issues and Communities in Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh, Policy Brief No. 3*. Dhaka: South Asia Watch on Trade, Economics and Environment (SWATEE).
- Shipton, P. 1989. *Land and the Limits of Individualism: Population Growth and Tenure Reforms South of the Sahara*. *Development discussion paper no. 320*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard Institute for International Development.
- Tebtebba Foundation Inc. 2000. *The Chittagong Hill Tracts: The Road to Lasting Peace*. Baguio City, Philippines.