



For Citation: Zakaria, A.F.M.2015. The Roots and Routs: Forest Policy Phases in Bangladesh. JWHS D, 1, 73-85. Available at: <http://wwhsdc.org/jwhsd/articels/>

## THE ROOTS AND ROUTS: FOREST POLICY PHASES IN BANGLADESH

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### Abstract

*This paper is all about the descriptive analysis of policy phases in the context of Bangladesh with reference to National Forest Policy-1994. It mainly deals with two objectives regarding the forestry policy of Bangladesh which explore what is the status of policy initiatives taken for forestry sector development and investigate the changing policy trends regarding this sector with special focuses in tracing the power structure and development politics are underlined with the formulation and reformulation of forestry sector of Bangladesh.*

**Keywords:** forests; forest policies; policy cycle; Bangladesh

### 1. Introduction

Forest and forest policies are the crucial and controversial issues in policy politics all over the world. Issues of biodiversity, cultural diversity, and climate change make forest policy as more complex area of negotiation. Bangladesh has progressed well in achieving the most of the targets to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) except the targets related to forest and environment (MDGs, 2014). The Forestry Master Plan (FMP) describes that total forest covers 2.56 million hectares (m ha) or 17.8% of Bangladesh land area (World Bank, 2012). Bangladesh is recognized as one of the most vulnerable countries due to dominance of floodplains, low elevation from the sea and the socio-



economical characters like high population density, high levels of poverty, and overwhelming dependence on forest. However, the forest sectors contribution to GDP is around 4% and definitely this contribution may increase if a proper management is installed (World Bank, 2012).

Policy is not a product of single decision rather it is a long process (Rosenbaum, 2011). This research paper mainly deals with the different phases of the forest policy of Bangladesh and also explores the current status of policy initiatives taken for the forestry sector development. Moreover, it investigates the changing policy trends regarding this sector by reviewing relevant documents from Bangladesh Government websites and different scholarly articles. This paper actually demonstrates a policy analysis on the revision of existing policies regarding forestry sector of Bangladesh by using the policy phases.

## 2. Process of Analysis

This paper is based on secondary sources. Review of relevant documents and collect all possible information and data from online and archive. Content analysis is the method of elevating social reality with a manifest text and within a non-manifest context (Sadath & Krott, 2012). It is widely accepted that content analysis as the research technique for making explicative and valid inferences from data to their context. Following content and narratives analysis this paper tries to assess the trend and directions of the Forests and Forestry sector of Bangladesh.

## 3. Theoretical Issues

Policy has become an increasingly central concept and apparatus in the organization of existing societies. Like the modern state (to which its growth can be linked), policy now impinges on all areas of life so that it is virtually impossible to ignore or run away its influence (Shore and Wright, 1997). It



is very important to trace out and analyze the role and scope of public engagement in policy making process. Policy is not a product of single decision rather a long process. Like as other policy process, forest policy also has gone through the same cycle, politics on agenda generation, formulation and legitimation, implementation, assessment and reformulation (Rosenbaum, 2011). This interplay of different actors in policy process is well known as politics in policy process. Generally Policy formulation and adoption is mostly a government program that includes the definition of policy objectives and consideration of alternative actions or initiatives. To interpret the forest policies of Bangladesh, positive analysis is also adopted although positive analysis emphasizes more on the actual content of a policy rather than politics.

#### 4. Agenda Setting

In public policy process 'agenda setting' is a stage where ideas get generated and get promoted for capturing the attention of the policy makers. Here, I try to sketch-out the background of the Forest Policy of 1994; how it is emerged as an issue in policy politics of Bangladesh. After the liberation of Bangladesh (1971) from Pakistani occupation, financial hardship make all the existing legislations/policies are ineffective. The first Bangladesh forestry conference was held in 1977, a significant call for national forestry and a growing concern for forests (Mustafa, 2002). The Stockholm mandate of 1972 and FAO/UNDP review on the forestry sector pursue the government of Bangladesh (GoB), to respond in the protection of global environment. The idea of environmental protection through national efforts was first recognized and declared with the amendment of the colonial (British-Pakistan) Forest Policy in 1979 with the additional objective in providing greater protection and placing greater emphasis on conservation in the country's forest assets whilst concomitantly developing



its rural and industrial economies. On that time forest is considered one of the major sub-sectors of agriculture Sector in Bangladesh and also considered a revenue earning sub-sector. Under the Agricultural Ministry, Bangladesh Government takes some programs like Upland Settlement Program (USP), Jhoomia Rehabilitation Programme in Chittagong Hill Tracts Phase I and II (1979 – 95) and Forestry Sector Project in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT). These projects are identified as a means of controlling the Indigenous People (Jhoomia) and their shifting cultivation (Jhoom) rather preserving the forest, by the civil society and Indigenous leaders (Khan, 2001). However, the policy largely ignored the crucial issue of community participation and, consequently, little changed in comparison to the traditional commercial approach to forestry, which actually raises huge reactions among the stakeholders.

In 1989 the GoB established the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoEF) by separating from the Ministry of Agriculture and in the same year the GoB made a request to the Donors for making a Master Plan for the forestry sector. Responding to Government's request of assistance in forest sustainable development and to seize deforestation, the Asian Development Bank, UNDP, and FAO provided support for the preparation of the Master Plan. The exercise lasted for almost four years and the planning document was finally available in September 1993. During the formulation process of the Forestry Master Plan, the experts felt the necessity of revising the existing 1979 forest policy in order to facilitate the effective execution of the proposed Master Plan. The Donors requested to reform the forest policy to the GoB. In the Master Plan this recommendation was appeared very strongly. The experts argued that to make the Master Plan functional, different aspects of the policy should be updated by incorporating the changes occurred in different fields of conservation and management of forestry (Chowdhury, 2003). Further, the GoB research institutions like Bangladesh Forest Research



Institute (BFRI), Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS), other independent researchers, and environmental NGO's and activists also have been suggesting for long to make a fresh Forest Policy. In addition, Rio declaration and agenda 21 also motivate Bangladesh Govt. to act more pro-environment. Meanwhile, forest issue also got concentration by the political parties and managed a space in election manifesto of Bangladesh Nationalist Party in 1991 who were in the power during 1991-1995. These facts actually led the GoB to adopt a fresh forest policy.

## 5. Formulation and Legitimation

In the formation of Forest Policy, different actors and factors played some direct and indirect roles. Basically two types of actors were engaged in this process: external and internal. Among external actors, international forum, international organizations, donor agencies (FAO, UNDP, ADB, World Bank (WB)) were major players. The example of internal actors are government agencies i.e. MoEF, Forest Department (FD), Planning Commission, concerned ministries, consultants, bureaucrats, BFRI, BIDS, non-government actors like civil society, community based actors, and national and international environmental NGOs (BCAS, IUCN, ADAB etc.) and so on. All the actors, whether external or internal, played very significant roles in the formulation of the Forest Policy. Continuous follow-up by these actors turn this agenda into the formulation process rather than this agenda fall into the graveyard. Accordingly, in 1992, MoEF engaged a batch of departmental experts and available consultants for preparation of a draft National Policy by revising the existing policy of 1979. In 1994, the consultants submitted their report with the proposed revisions to the FD. The FD forwarded the policy document to the MOEF for arranging approval by the Govt. The Ministry instantly forwarded the draft policy to the Cabinet Division for placing it before the Cabinet for final approval. The Cabinet



discussed the policy in the formal meeting of the Council of Ministers and accorded the final approval of the Government which was approved and enacted in 1994 (Chowdhury, 2003). The approved policy was published in the official gazette on May 31, 1995 as the Forest Policy 1994.

This policy marks a major departure from the manifestly commercial considerations of the earlier policies (Khan 2001). An overall enunciation of the people's participation was given in the first statement to achieve the government's target to bring 20% of land under forest cover by the year 2015. An aim of the government in the policy is to keep 10% of the national forests as protected area by the year 2015; this expressed the Government's firm commitment to biodiversity conservation and ecosystem protection. The policy seeks participation of local people in forest protection. This policy also depicted taking up mass media campaigning to create massive awareness about forest protection. It also emphasized on introducing modern and appropriate technology to reduce the losses in collection and production of forest materials.

Additionally, with Forest Policy 1994, the GoB adopt a Private Forest Policy at the end of the 1994 to accelerate the pace of the program through the coordinated efforts of the government and NGOs and active participation of the people in order to achieve self-reliance in forest products and maintenance of ecological balance.

In the context of Forest policy Legitimation, there are much legislation, rules and bylaws are amended and adopted by the GoB to conduct and to exercise authority in forest management. The Forest Act of 1927, as amended with its related rules and regulations, is still the basic law governing forests in Bangladesh. After the independence of Bangladesh, the Forest Act was amended in 1974 but the major changes were taken place in 1989. The Forest Act was enacted to preserve and safeguard of forest in both public and private. This Act also implement over the Cattle, Forest Officer, Forest



Office, Forest Produce, Owner, River Timber and Tree (Mohammad, 2013). The emphasis of the Act is on the protection of reserved forest. Some important features of the Act are: (i) under the purview of the Forest Act, all rights or claims over forestlands have been settled at the time of the reservation, (ii) Any activity within the forest reserves is prohibited, unless permitted by the Forest Department; and (iii) The Act empowers the Forest Department to regulate the use of water-courses within Reserve Forests. In 2000, another Amendment is passed to the Forest Act with sanctioning the Social Forestry (SF), on any government or private land and provided scope to adopt rules and programs, which were followed-up by the Social Forestry Rules of 2004. The Rules defined generally the process of beneficiaries' selection, roles and responsibilities of different stakeholders, management, capacity building and distribution of earnings from social afforestation (FD and Arannayk, 2013). A separate protected area legislation is still under process, for now on protected areas are regulated under The Bangladesh Wild Life (Preservation) Order, 1973. Moreover, the Private Forest Ordinance 1959 allows FD to take over management of improperly managed private forest lands, any private lands that can be afforested, and any land lying fallow for more than three years.

## 6. Implementation

Policy implementation means transcribing the policy into plan and action. As per organizational set up of the GoB, the MoEF is the central authority to responsible for translating the Forest Policy into action. The MoEF implements most of the forestry plan through different projects by the FD. Working Plan was the first plan in the history forest management of Bangladesh (1971-91). Since 1995, FMP is considered the main guideline for taking any initiative. FMP emphasizes on forest conservation and aimed to increase the country's land area under tree cover. The Plan provides a





framework for optimizing the forestry sector's ability to stabilize environmental conditions and assist economic and social development (Mustafa, 2002). Three imperatives were identified: sustainability, efficiency, and people's participation. Following FMP at the end of 1994, UNDP prepared the first formal plan which is National Environmental Management Plan for the next decades. Between 1990 and 1995 the GoB expense about 84 million US dollar in the forestry sector through fourth five year plan of Bangladesh. From 2001-2011, the GoB manifested National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan 2004, National Action Programme (NAP) for Combating Desertification 2005, National Adaptation Programme of Action (NAPA) 2005, and Bangladesh Tiger Action Plan 2009. For 2011 onwards, Integrated Forest Management Plan which is prepared by jointly the Mandala Agricultural Development Corporation and the FD, financed by WB (Mokhtar & Hussain, \*\*\*). Apart from these plans comanagement also adopted in Protected area with the assistance of USAID. According to MoEF in 2013-14 budget allocation for the forestry sector is about 65 million US dollar where 50 million US dollar come from the Donors and Arannayk is also spending about 50 million US Dollar alied with UNDP and GoB (MoEF website).

For policy outcomes, government generally employed some tools to change the behavior of individuals, communities and organizations, these tools are known as policy instruments (Winfield, 2009). To transcribe Forest Policy into the reality, the GoB applies wide ranges of policy instruments including regulatory, economic, informational to educational instruments. Traditionally, the GoB uses regulatory instrument under Forest Act 1927 although regulatory instruments are still very weak by its nature and substance. In Reserve forest, who enters with fire arms without prior permission from the Divisional Forest Officer concerned and if the matter present to the Court, the accused person may be directed with fine and imprisonment for a term which may extend to five years and from six months,





and fine which may extend to fifty thousand Taka (BD) and not less than five thousand Taka. According to Brick Burning Act 1989 (re-amended in 2013)---if anyone set-up in forest area and uses firewood then s/he may punish by two years imprisonment and may be fined by up to 5 lakh taka. Sawmill Act 1998 (re-amended in 2012) also works as a regulatory instruments.

From late nineties, the GoB has been introducing economic instruments in the forestry sector. And now these instruments are dominant and considered very effective to regulate the behavior of stakeholders. SANDEE Policy Brief identified some economic instruments enacted in Bangladesh, which are Community Forestry, Ecotourism, Protected Area entry fees, Public Climate and Environment Expenditure review, Reinvestment fee in PA (SANDEE, 2012). Apart from these instruments, Wild Life Compensation, Tree plantation Award and Marketing Forest Product also are considered economic instruments. Providing financial incentive in using renewable energy like Solar energy and Bio-gas are identified a significant development of policy instrument in Bangladesh.

Carbon Inventory is also introduced recently by USAID assistance through IPAC. Resource Information System (RIMS) educates people by providing maps and reports. GoB encourages scientists to study on forestry sector through BFRI/BIDS and public universities. Moreover, Co-management and ecotourism are playing a key role in educating forest villagers and general people.

## 7. Monitoring and Evaluation

The system of monitoring the progress and actions for ascertaining the extent of the implementation of the national policy has not been maintained by MoEF or FD. The Planning Commission through IMED evaluates the achievements of the national forest program as against set objective. Within the FD, there is a monitoring cell conducting very limited survey to evaluate the



process of forest policy in the country (FAO, 2004). RIMS provides some information but not enough to assess the whole forest scenario. Carbon inventory is a new addition in monitoring the Mangrove forest. Only 13.20 percent of land is under tree cover with 30 percent density is achieved which is just above the half of the target set by 2015 (MDGs, 2014). And the irony is that most of the new trees are invasive alien species like Acacia and Eucalyptus which are colonizing the environment and are aggressively a mediator of negative change and threatening the native biodiversity of Bangladesh (Afrin et al, 2010). Moreover, the REED+ Roadmap expresses very harsh criticism regarding policy, from structural maladjustments to policy attitudes like inappropriate regulation on agricultural expansion, military base expansion and establishment, tea garden, mismanagement, corruption, illegal logging, tobacco production, poor governance, unplanned industrial development, tourism business (REED+, 2012). Apart from these weakness and mismanagements, the biggest challenge is the availability of fund. FD is project oriented, when there is no fund there is no project, there is no activities in the forest (Chowdhury et al, 2011).

On behalf of the contributing Development Partners, and in consultation with the GoB, the World Bank is supervising the Bangladesh Climate Change Resilience Fund (BCCRF) and this role of WB will be continued for a certain period. In 2012, the WB come up with a proposal to review the existing policy and master plan and in the proposal, WB highlights a demand for making a Comprehensive Forest Resources Assessment. Also the WB proposed for updating the Master Plan as it will be outdated by the year of 2015 (WB, 2012). With the consent of the GoB, the WB already initiated the process. By these initiatives the WB expects Bangladesh will enter in a new era of forest management.



## 8. Conclusion

The Forest Policy regime in Bangladesh shows very slow paradigm shift from traditional revenue and production era to protection era. It is clear that the Forest Policy still far behind especially in installing a comprehensive update regulatory instruments. By preparing REED+ Roadmap Framework and reassuring the promise in achieving the targets of MDGs, the GoB shows a high level of commitment in promoting more pro-people initiatives under this Forest Policy. However, from agenda setting to implementation, and in another way from preparing master plan to management framework, all initiations and preparations are done (or supervised!) by the Donors rather than the government, which indicates a high level of (imposed!) dependency and so coloniality prevail instead of sustainability in the context of forest management of Bangladesh.

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\* Some important GoB website links: (Forest Policy 1994 and most of the other plans and projects can be found through this link).

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<http://www.bforest.gov.bd> (FD).

<http://foundation.e-arttic.com/wiki/tiki-index.php?page=Bio+energy+overview> (Renewable Energy Resource).

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