

Project Update: January 2014

Background of the project

Forestlands make up almost 18% of the total lands in Bangladesh where natural forest accounts for about 31% (FAO 1998). REDD+ is now a central topic of research and discussion in the arena of climate change mitigation and forest conservation. The financial incentives for REDD+ in many pilot projects established in several countries have been found to alter the drivers of land use changes by reducing opportunity costs of retaining forest cover, and as multipartite solutions that not only generate profits and reduce carbon emissions, but also provide benefits for human development and biodiversity (Carlson & Curran 2009). The importance of traditional ecological knowledge, usufructs of the forest dependent peoples has been emphasized for the successful implementation of REDD+ (Melick 2010). Bangladesh has no pilot project on REDD+. Some parts of tropical semi-evergreen forests in the CHTs in Bangladesh is severely deforested and degraded. REDD+ can potentially conserve forests and mitigate climate change. So, it concerns a research question what is the tradeoffs between forest conservation and livelihoods of the forest dependent peoples which can be incorporated while planning for the REDD+ project in the CHTs. The present proposed study aims at answering this research question.

Expected contribution of the project

The visualization of trade-offs between forest conservation and livelihoods of the forest dependent peoples considering forest biodiversity use and livelihoods vulnerability will contribute understanding the range of involvement of the peoples for forest conservation. Identification of trade-offs between forest biodiversity use and carbon benefits will contribute to sharing the carbon benefits with the forest peoples. Identifying alternative livelihoods will be important for diverting forest dependent peoples from overusing the natural forests. All of these will contribute adopting REDD+ program in the selected forest areas of Bangladesh along with the conservation of forest biodiversity and livelihood development of the forest dependent peoples.

Methodology and activities

The study has been conducted in Khagrachhari Sadar, Dighinala and Mohalchari Upazila¹ of Khagrachhari district under Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) of Bangladesh through stratified random sampling technique. The ultimate sampling units were the households dependent on the Village Common Forests (VCF) under tropical semi-evergreen forest ecosystem. The study /awareness program was conducted from March 2013 to December 2014 involving a complementary ethnographic analysis and socially and culturally sensitive TEK (Traditional Ecological Knowledge) gathering method. The study included physical observation and ethnographic field notes. However, it consisted of structured and semi-structured data gathering of community-based information. For the study, TEK of three tribal communities, Chakma, Tripura and Marma living inside the tropical semi-evergreen forests were sampled purposively. The total area of Khagrachhari district is 2749.16 km² of which around 82% of the lands are covered by forests, though having deforestation and degradation in most parts of the area. The population Census 2011 shows that the major ethnic groups living in the Khagrachhari district are Chakma, Tripura and Marma representing 51%, 27% and 21%,

¹ Local government unit under a district

respectively, of all the ethnic populations (BBS 2012). As each of the ethnic communities has the separate entity regarding their forest dependence culture, the three communities were considered as different strata in this study. Our study incorporated the samples of each 60 households from Chakma and Tripura and 37 from Marma community. We had a target to sample 60 households from the Marma tribe also, but we did not find enough forest dependent Marma communities in our study areas. The natural forests the communities were dependent were Komolchari, Golabari, Boalkhali, Nonachari, and Bangalkathi VCF.

A reconnaissance survey on March 2013 was the first step to obtain an overview of the forests and ethnic communities in the Khagrachari district of the Chittagong Hill Tracts of Bangladesh. We commenced the final survey from April 2013. I started inputting data into the SPSS statistical package 17.0 and analyzing since June 2013. Still I am analyzing the data for final reporting. Under the awareness program, we observed the World Environment Day 2013 on 5th June 2013 (the report-documentation is as below). In Khagrachari district, we conducted four awareness programs on forest conservation and REDD+ in the meantime. I expect to submit a complete project report on February-March 2014. Publications and outreach (brochures, scientific articles, etc.) will be prepared during February-March 2014.

The field observation shows that the forest dependent communities were mostly illiterate. Forest dependence was their cultural entity which was inevitable for their subsistence livelihoods also. For cash crop cultivation, they practiced *Juming* (shifting cultivation). The important objectives of their natural management were sustaining pure drinking water supply, medicinal use and cooking energy. Generally, all the tribes were found dependent on the natural forests having some differences in cultural practices. In the regime of REDD+ implementation in Khagrachari, refraining them from water harvesting, religious and medicinal use of the plants will be difficult. However, provisioning improved cooking stoves and alternative cooking fuels and providing alternative livelihoods may improve the REDD+ success in this area. The concerns from the local elites, community leaders, political leaders improved our understandings on the trade-offs between the forest use and the expected REDD+ program in this area. We tried to make a network among the local NGO activists, students, teachers, religious and political leaders, and environmentalist through our study and the awareness programs. It created an enthusiasm on REDD+ and forest conservation.

Observation of the World Environment Day 2013

As the awareness campaign, my project participated in the World Environment Day 2013 on 5th June 2013 in joint collaboration with the Institute of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, Chittagong University (IFESCU). At 10:30 am, my project including its team members with the banner and play-cards, participated in the environmental rally inside the campus of University of Chittagong. The Vice-Chancellor (Acting) (Professor Dr. Imran Hossain) and Pro-Vice Chancellor (Professor Dr. Iftekhar Uddin Chowdhury) of University of Chittagong, Director and other colleagues of IFESCU, along with hundreds of students attended the environmental rally. The banner and the play-cards mentioning the title of my project were embedded by the logo of the Rufford Foundation. After the rally at around 11:15, we joined a tree plantation program in front of the Social Science Faculty of University of Chittagong. After that I participated in a seminar in the conference room of IFESCU with my project banner. I was a keynote speaker there. I presented the findings of my previous project (Traditional Ecological Knowledge in the REDD+ Strategies in

Bangladesh, RSG reference 9912-1) in the seminar. However, the title of the paper presented was 'Forest dependence of Chakma community in Rangamati: Scaling up REDD+ strategies in Bangladesh'. In the plenary session of the seminar, honorable Vice Chancellor and Pro-Vice Chancellor of University of Chittagong talked on the light of this paper and especially on conservation of forests and heritage. After that I presented my paper where I had to face many questions and comments. The designated chief discussant on this paper was Mr. SM Munirul Hasan, Associate Professor, Department of Sociology, and University of Chittagong. The designated and undesignated discussion on this paper gave me a fine tuning methodology of my present project and awareness campaigns on forest conservation in Bangladesh. All costs of the seminar organization were born by my project. Some focus photographs on this World Environment Day 2013 have been shown here.

References

BBS (2012). Bangladesh Population and Housing Census 2011. <http://www.bbs.gov.bd> . Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics, Ministry of Planning, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, Dhaka.

Carlson KM, Curran LM (2009). REDD Pilot Project Scenarios: Are Costs and Benefits Altered by Spatial Scale? Environmental Research Letter 4.

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