



CONFRONTING PEOPLE-ORIENTED FOREST MANAGEMENT REALITIES IN BANGLADESH: AN ANALYSIS OF ACTORS' PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The shift in traditional forest management to a people-oriented forestry (PF) approach was initiated by the government of Bangladesh in the early 1980s with the view that it can simultaneously address natural resource management and rural development. This paper explores the reality of PF programs in Bangladesh by focusing on different actors and interactions between those actors and challenges in PF programs. This is to analyze the role of power relations, exclusion and inclusion, policy making and institutional factors in PF. Data were obtained through participation and observation, interviews, analysis and literature review. The paper shows that power and other social relations within and between the central governments, forest departments and other mid-level actors in PF programs have had a key influence in determined who is excluded and who is included and whose knowledge will be acknowledged. Despite this, the dominant roles played by top level actors over middle and lower levels actors have hindered the overall success and main goals of PF programs. Moreover, the involvement of poor people in PF programs has a deep-rooted dependency on the local political leaders and elite, and often these mid-level actors have built up a strong network together with forest officials in order to influence the participant selection process, and thus enjoy undue benefits and include non-poor in PF programs. Therefore, the ambitious policies introduced by the top-level actors will most likely not benefit the poor and target groups unless strict actions are taken to overcome the current institutional and power-based obstacles.

Keywords: *people-oriented forestry, decentralization, actor, interaction, power-relation, institutional factors*

Introduction

Decentralization in forest management policies started as a response to institutional malfunction. During the last two decades new and more people-

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oriented forest management paradigms have become major policy trends in many of the world's developing countries (Shahabaz 2009; Ribot 2002; Gilmour 2003; Prasad and Kant 2003). Although great effort has been made to increase the benefits from forests and this can only happen if program no longer rely on traditional policies and practices that allow or enhance local producers and elite groups' access to forest resources, forestry based markets and overall profit of this sector (Larson and Ribot 2009). Many national governments have diverse and differently mediated forest access rights (Scott 1998). In many countries, forest laws and regulations were formulated to ensure privileged access to timber merchants and to check counter-appropriation by the poor (Larson and Ribot 2009; Sunderlin *et al.* 2005).

People-oriented forest management policy is based on a partnership between the government and local communities. The approach was established as a powerful tool for sustainable natural resource management and poverty reduction all over the world (Khadka 2009; FAO 1999). This new people-oriented forest management strategy was sometime termed as social forestry or community forestry (Wiersum 2004). In general, social forestry relates to the planning and implementation by professional foresters and other organizations to engage the vigorous participation of local people in small-scale forest projects as a means to improve their livelihoods (Wiersum 2004). On the other hand, community forestry refers to the forest management activities that are carried out by people living within rural communities, who are not like professional foresters, and they carry out forest management activities based on their own knowledge and interests (Wiersum 2004). However, for the purpose of this paper, we refer to all o new pro-people forest management paradigms as people-oriented forestry (PF).

In the majority of the cases, either local governments have received permission (authotiy) from top level to implement the PF programs, or else local level institutions have been formed to launch the PF program within the guidance of central government (Malla 2000; Saigal 2000; Larson and Ribot 2004). However, the social and ecological outcomes of these programs seem to differ to a great extent. There are both positive (Wells *et al.* 1992; Ribot 2003) and negative (Ribot 2003; Marcus 2001) experiences as a result of different PF management strategies in natural resources conservation.

During the colonial period, forests of Bangladesh were under the active administration of the Indian Forest Service, and, as a consequence, forestlands of Bangladesh were negatively affected in similar ways of other parts of South Asia (Ali and Hoque 2009; Ali *et al.* 2006). In post-colonial periods, the situation of Bangladesh's forests and forest dependent people has not improved. The forest resources of Bangladesh and its concerned authority, the Forest Department (FD), have been held back from modernizing due to the influence of dominant traditional approaches and a complex bureaucratic

process (Nath and Inoue 2010). The malfunction of state based resource management revealed that there was a need to modify state policies and strategies to involve local actors living in and around the forest areas (Nath and Inoue 2010; Islam and Sato 2010).

In Bangladesh, PF officially started in 1979. The first PF activities were initiated by donor funded projects in 1981 with the control of Forest Department (representing state) and complex bureaucratic process (Muhammed *et al* 2005; Salam and Noguchi 2005). This approach had not changed to this day, and PF activities in Bangladesh are still treated as a donor funded and central government imposed program in forest management activities (Nath and Inoue 2010). In this respect, the FD has maintained donor imposed criteria as well as their rules and regulations for implementing PF projects in Bangladesh. While the FD has decentralized their power to divisional levels to initiate PF activities, and also established a separate wing namely, 'Social Forestry Wing' (BFD 2011), the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO, decentralized FD officer at Divisional level) is the one who has the supreme power to initiate PF activities with the direct guidance of local Range (forest administrative units) and Beat (the lowest administrative units of FD) office. The 'Social Forestry Rules 2004' clearly mention that the local forest department has to consult with the respective Union Parishad Leaders (local government) and at least two members from the applicant community before being able to finalize the PF programs. However, the main criticisms of the PF program relate to the selection of the local participants together with systematic corruptions of mid level actors (Islam and Sato 2010; Muhammed *et al.* 2008, Safa 2004).

In the literature related to PF literature, we find reference to the misconduct or corruption of local FD officials and the power and influence they wield over lower level subordinates actors. Cases of limited or no access to resources and economic benefits by the forest dependent people, landless farmers, ethnic minority, destitute women and other disadvantaged groups of the society, and lack of honesty of middle level administrative staff have also been reported in the literature (Islam and Sato 2010; Muhammed *et al.* 2005, 2008; Safa 2004; Salam and Noguchi 2005; Ahmed 2008; Gain 2002, 2005). The local FD staff and the PF planning and implementation processes have often been influenced by the interests of local political leaders, elite, timber traders and other powerful people (like- local political leaders have created pressure to the FD officer to include non-poor in PF process at Madhupur Sal forests area) to the point of hindering and changing the main goals of PF activities in Bangladesh (Muhammed *et al.* 2008). In spite of these barriers, participation of local communities in PF activities and benefit sharing plantation scheme in government or semi-government lands have increased in numbers (for

example- until 2010 a total of 85900 people were involved in PF programs, but now the figure is 102480) (Muhammed *et al.* 2005; BFD 2011).

People-oriented forestry is a well-known state driven program in Bangladesh, and this is because of its stated goal to include local and poor people in forestry activities to uplift their socio-economic conditions. A number of researchers have conducted different types of research over the years on the issue of people's participation. Most of them have focused on economic aspects and policies as well as livelihood improvement for local people. However, there has not been any specific study emphasizing the interactions and relationships of various actors at the top, mid and bottom levels of PF programs in Bangladesh. Our research has focused on the major actors in PF and the interactions among those actors that created additional challenges to PF activities in Bangladesh.

Methodology

For assessing actors and their interactions in PF activities, this research has relied on the use of participation and observation, interviews for primary data collection. Secondary data were obtained through different peer-reviewed journals, local field documents and project reports, Bangladesh Forest Department website and library, related books and reliable online sources (such as Kyushu university online library, Scopus, Google Scholar). With the above objectives in mind, this paper constructs an actor based frameworks which can easily visualize PF actors in top, mid and lower levels, and the following three main sections give a brief overview of PF perspectives in Bangladesh, PF actors and lastly actors' interactions and challenges.

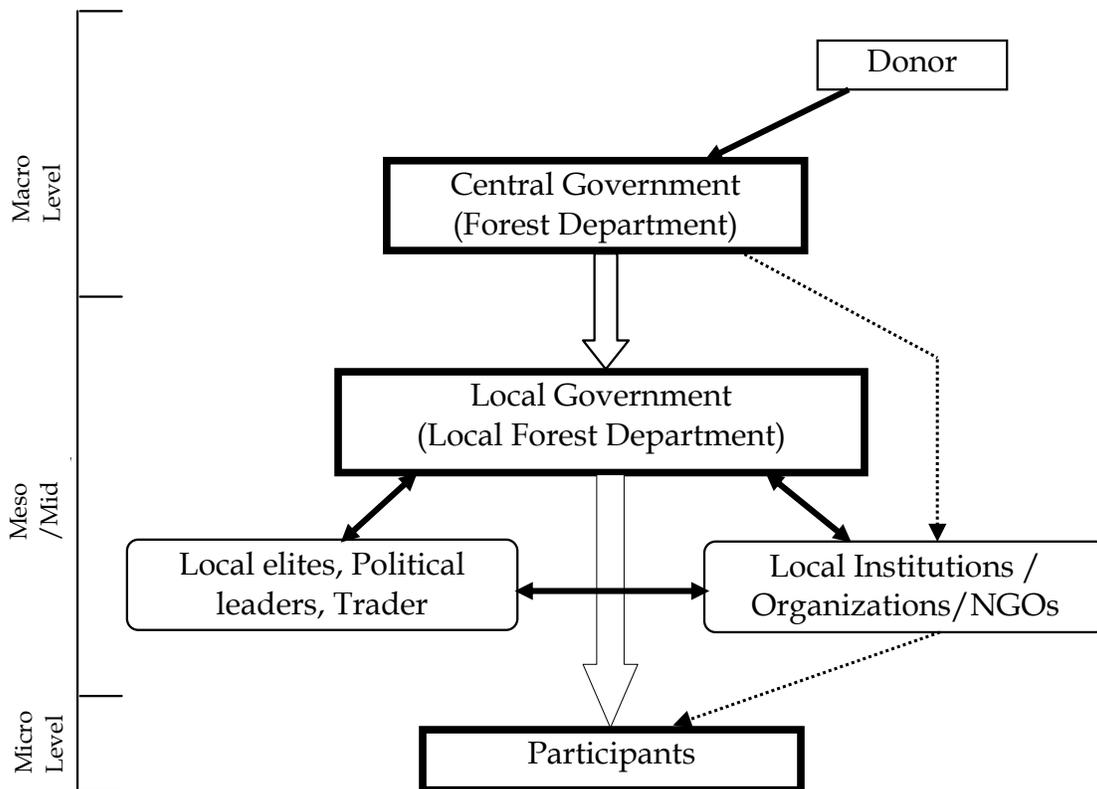
An Actor-based Framework

Actors' interactions can be defined as the processes and exchanges that take place among micro (lower), meso (mid) and macro (top) level actors in order to plan and implement PF in Bangladesh. The outcome of the interactions depend on many factors like: power relationships between actors, their perception of inclusion/exclusion on issues related to PF, and other institutional aspects that affect and shape the dominant ideology in the planning and implementation of PF (Khadka 2009). The concept of 'participation' and involvement of different actors in the PF process can hardly bypass structural and institutional constraints arising from different levels of power relations (Shahbaz 2009). Moreover, PF exclusion is apparent in restricted and inequitable access to natural and common resources and the lack of decision-making rights for local communities who depend on natural resources for their livelihoods.

In Bangladesh, PF has established as the collaboration of local community and government institutions. However, in this initiative, many

actors/stakeholders are involved from top to bottom levels, and the success of this initiative depends on many additional aspects and institutional factors too. This study focuses on North (1990) concept, in particular the main actors (FD) who have the supreme power in the PF process and their relationship/interactions to other actors. North (1990) has pointed out that institutions refer to two different dimensions. Firstly, there are the rules (legal or customary) for assigning resources, such as the customs and laws affecting land ownership and tenure, transfer and inheritance of assets, or relations between employer and employee, or parent and child. Secondly, there are the organizations defending particular interests (e.g. trade union), including the state's interest in implementing or altering rules (e.g. polices, some aspect of education). This study puts particular emphasis on the 'relationship' between participants and FD and also looks at the 'interests' over different actors as institutional factors in PF. Often, decision reagrding planning and implementation at central FD level were influenced by the donors. Therefore, the donor has an important role as a top level actor in the PF process in Bangladesh. If we articulate all of the PF actors and their power relationship into a frame, it should give a clear idea about the macro, meso and micro level actors (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Main Actors in People-Oriented Forestry and Their Mode of Action



People-oriented Forestry Perspective in Bangladesh

Before discussing people-oriented forestry, it is necessary to present an argument or ideas that are used to support and confront different forest management approaches (Table 1).

Table 1: An Overview of Arguments for People-Oriented and Top Down Forest Management and Conservation Approaches

	People-oriented Approach		Top-Down Approach
	Community Forestry	Social Forestry/ Participatory Forestry	
Resource control	Local community has control over resources	Local people or community do not have control over resources	Local people do not have any control over resources; only Government has direct control
Knowledge	Local people have in-depth knowledge on sustainable forests management	Local people have partial knowledge on sustainable forests management	Experts have in-depth knowledge on sustainable forests management
Dependability	Local community highly depends on natural resources and often get incentives from state	Local people and state share benefits, and poor people also depends on natural resources for livelihood improvements	Generally state represents wider interests of community/society
Management	Management of common pool resources and formed formal or informal forest user group	Involve local people in forest management, where benefit sharing is main aspect	State led or externally organized management and conservation approach
Access/Right	Local community have the right/access to decide about the use of resources and benefits around them	Both local people and state decided about the use and benefit sharing process before being started the program	State is solely responsible for use/management and conservation process/ approaches
Management period/cycle	Medium term	Short term	Long term
Effectiveness	People closer to forests with in-depth knowledge which is economically and	People always desire economic benefits and ignore/ no attention to ecological benefits	Most of the cases less effective and treated as failure approaches

	ecologically effective		
Main Beneficiaries	Whole community/ User groups and state	People from local community and state	Most of the cases powerful groups/elites
Main conflict	Among different user groups about the uses of common pool resources	Local people/ community Vs. forester/ local forest department	Mainly powerful groups/elites Vs. weak group/people of the nearby community

Source: Findings of this study; Vihemaki (2006); Agrawal and Gibson (1999); Wiersum (2004); Brechin *et al.* (2002)

The traditional colonial forest management system in Bangladesh has shifted gradually to a more participatory approach over the last two decades with the control of Bangladesh Forest Department (BFD 2011). The logic behind PF initiatives is involving local communities and other possible stakeholders in managing and protecting natural resources to make sure that their economic needs are addressed properly. The participation of local people's rights varies within a range of models and approaches. Participation may refer to the decision making, benefit sharing, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation rights of people (Uphoff 1979). A fair benefit-sharing scheme is the core theme to motivate local people in PF management in Bangladesh. Therefore, protecting and managing the natural degraded and encroached forests and people's participation have been influenced in Bangladesh mainly with the idea of benefit sharing approach (Table 2).

Table 2: Different Benefit Sharing Process in PF Programs in Bangladesh

PF Programs	Beneficiaries			
	FD	Participant	TFF	Land Owner other than FD
Sal forests land	45%	45%	10%	-
Natural forests (except Sal forests) land	50%	40%	10%	-
Other FD's land but initiated by local people	25%	75%	-	
Other Govt., semi-govt. and autonomous org. land but initiated by local people	10%	75%	-	15%

Source: Islam and Sato (2010); Bangladesh Gadget (2010)

This benefit sharing approach has played the key role to motivate people and ensure their participation in forest management in recent decade. The latest forest policy of 1994 has established people's benefit sharing rights to forest management activities. Consequently, the 'Social Forestry Rules of 2004' has clearly established the benefit sharing process among the different actors in Bangladesh. However, the power-relation and decision making rights are still controlling by the central government to implement any PF activities at local level. Although, the decentralized PF management system has lot of institutional and power-relation problems (created by top level actors), but the clear benefit sharing rights have gradually ensured local people's participation in PF process.

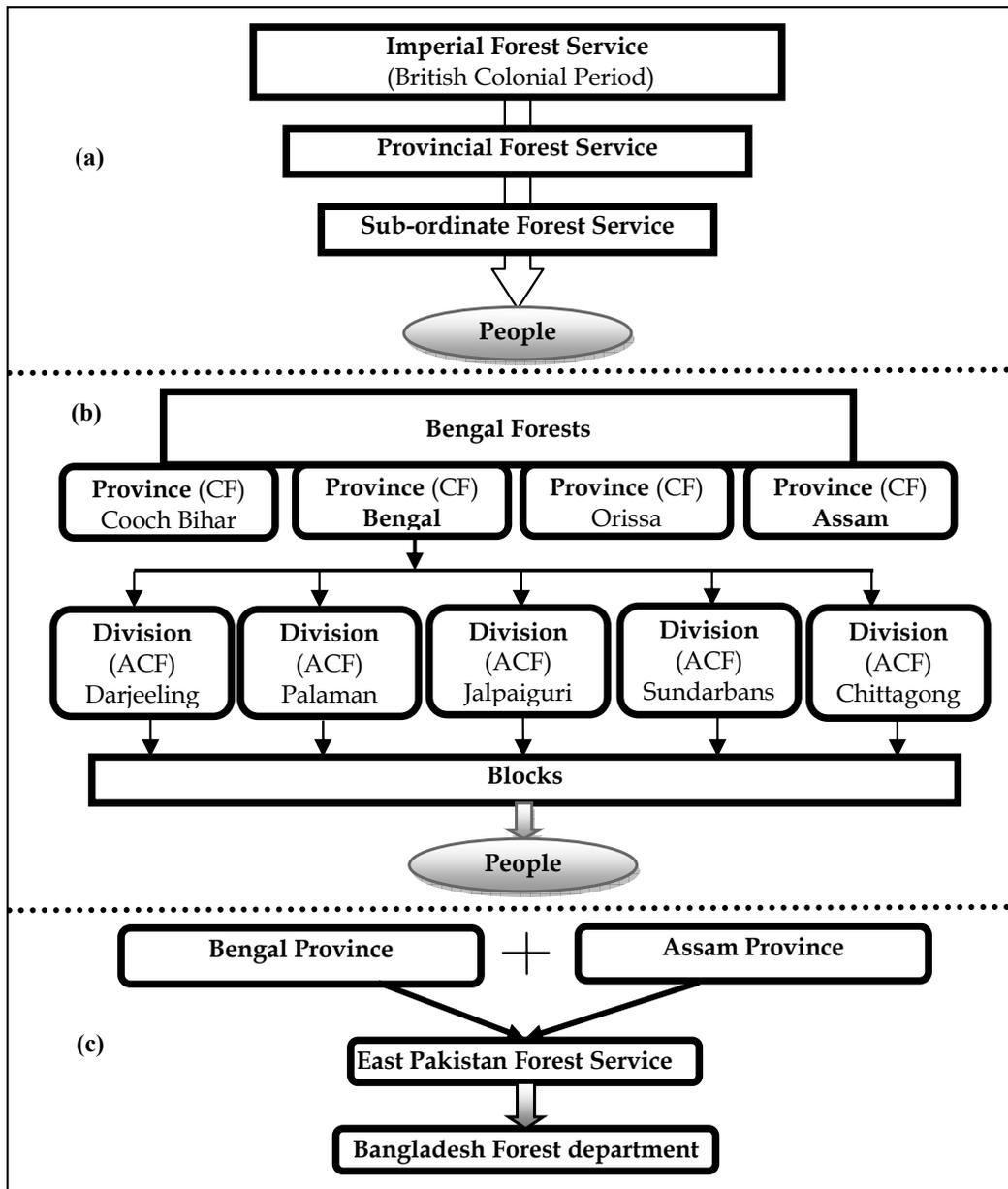
History

Literature reviewed revealed that during the British colonial period, the forests of the Indian Subcontinent started organizational reform under the Imperial Forest Service (IFS) (Figure 2) system in 1864. This Forest Service has experienced further distribution over provincial forest service with each province having several subordinate forest services (Figure 2). Actual forest conservation began in this region with the appointment of M.T. Anderson as Conservator of Forests (CF) of the lower provinces (Millat-e-Mustafa 2002). Later on, a divisional level forests office was created under Sir. William Schlich in 1871 (Millat-e-Mustafa 2002; Dwivedi 1980).

After the partition of the Indian Subcontinent in 1947, major parts of Bengal and a small part of the Assam provincial forests fell within the territory of East Pakistan Forest Service (Millat-e-Mustafa 2002; Wadud 1989). After liberalization in 1971, the East Pakistan Forest Service was changed to Bangladesh Forest Department (Figure 2). Figure 3 shows the current institutional setup of Bangladesh FD.

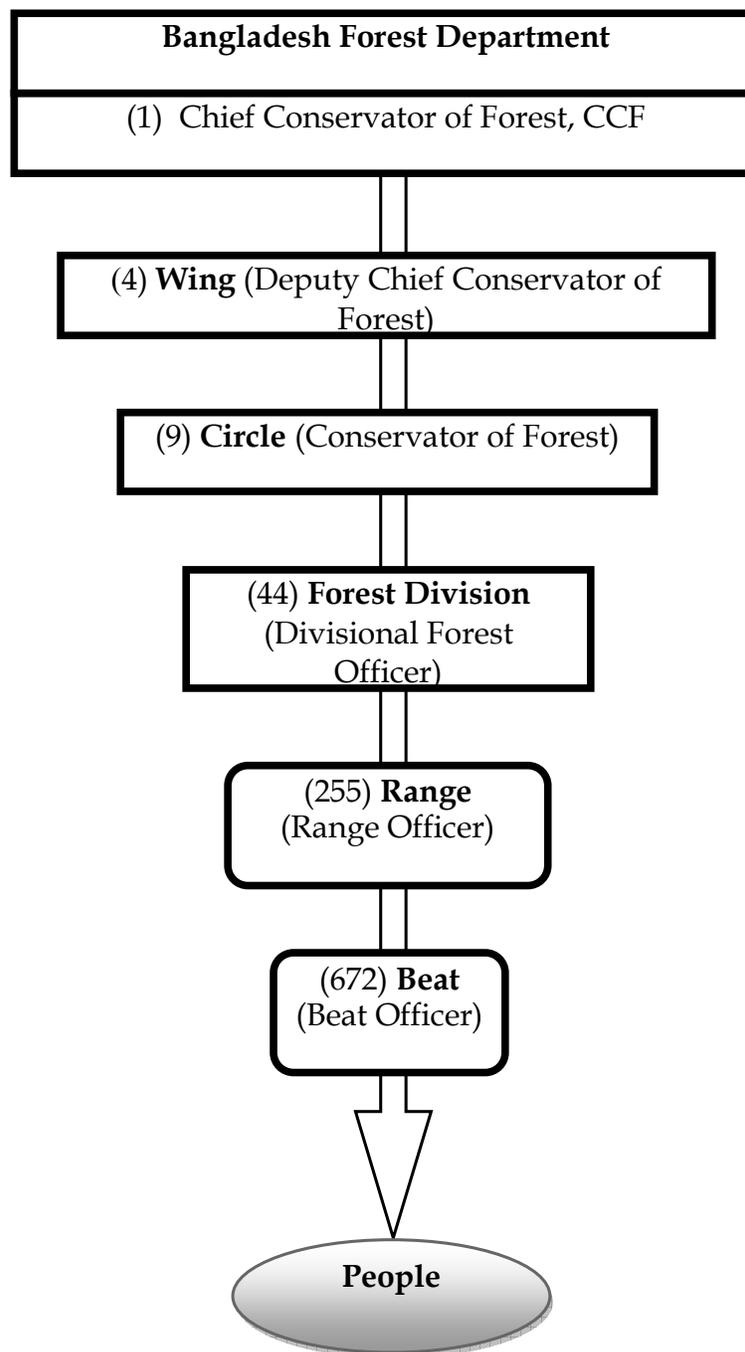
The social forestry activities were implemented in this country through the introduction of the 'Taungya System' in 1871 (Muhammed *et al.* 2005). However, the integration of people-oriented approaches was officially started in this region with the establishment of Forest Divisions in 1964 (Millat-e-Mustafa 2002). The first major activity was the establishment of nurseries at the divisional level (owned and managed by the government) to sell the seedlings to individual farmers or organizations at low (controlled) prices. The nurseries were located in urban areas and therefore could meet the seedling demands of town dwellers only.

Figure 2: History of Forests Administration and Pre-Decentralization Reforms in Bangladesh's Forest Department³



³(a) In 1862 forest administration decentralization started in this region. (b) Provincial forest management started in 1864. After the Indian Forest Act in 1865, further Divisional forest (headed by Assistant CF) and Blocks office was created to decentralize forest management. (c) After partition of Bengal in 1947, Bengal and a small portion of Assam provincial forests fell within the territory of former East Pakistan Forest Service, later on Bangladesh Forest Department (after liberation in 1971).

Figure 3: Present Structure of Bangladesh's Forest Department After Decentralization Reforms.⁴



⁴ The number in parenthesis represents the number of office at each level.

After the independence of Bangladesh, the first participatory (community) forestry program was started at Betagi and Pomora villages under the district of Chittagong in 1979 (Muhammed *et al.* 2005). The program was initiated by the advisory support of Prof. A. Alim and Prof. Dr. Mohammed Yunus (Nobel laureate) together with the Forest Department, and at first it covered 160 ha of government denuded hilly land (in Bengali called 'Khas' land) of Betagi village with 83 landless families. Subsequently it extended to another 205 ha of Khas land of Pomora villages with another group of 243 landless families. Landless families were allowed to grow crops in the area planted with trees from the seedlings from the program in their 1.62 ha of land for each household with the technical assistance of the Forest Department. However, this first PF example had not achieved its goal due to the lack of clear land tenure and ownership rights between the FD and tribal peoples. The tribal people wanted the recognition of land rights and did not accept FD controlled over forest resources. On the contrary, FD did not transfer land rights or supreme control or even not agreed to give them any recognition over government forests land (Rahman 1991, Muhammed *et al.* 2011).

A few years later, in 1980, another project was launched by the FD in the Chittagong hill tract areas to rehabilitate tribal (Jhumia) people (Muhammed *et al.* 2005). The major goal of the project was to improve the livelihoods of tribal families in the Unclassified State Forests (USF) land and denuded USF lands by starting an agroforestry production system and motivating tribal people about forest conservation (BFD 2011). The program however was discontinued due to severe conflicts among Forest Department, tribal people and other local stakeholders (mainly non-tribal or Bengali people living there). Like before, the tribal people wanted land tenure right and decision (controlling) making power. Furthermore, the local elite (non-tribal) also getting involved here which was created conflicts between the tribal and non-tribal people. Thus, the previous two initiatives were suffering the strict controlling systems of Forest Department (central government), conflicts between tribal and non-tribal and also shortages of funds. Subsequently, the big donor organizations (mainly- Asian development Bank and World Bank) have started to allocate funds for PF projects and enhanced decentralization process in Bangladesh forest management system. In 1981, the ADB funded several community forestry projects implemented in the seven northern districts of Bangladesh (BFD 2011). The main objectives of these projects were strip plantations, fuel wood plantations, agroforestry demonstration farming, replacement of depleted homestead woodlots, and training of FD personnel and villagers (ADB 1989; BFD 2011; Muhammed *et al.* 2005). Moreover other donor funded projects named 'Thana afforestation and nursery development project', 'Coastal greenbelt project', 'Forestry sector project' and 'Food assisted social forestry program' were implemented throughout the country

to enhance woodlot, agroforestry and strip plantations (BFD 2011) together with improvement of poor people conditions.

Unlike the initial PF programs, the plantation projects in different degraded forest land, government, semi-government and autonomous institution's land achieved substantial results. The plantation schemes based on benefit sharing of 45%: 45%: 10% among FD: local people: TFF (Future Tree Farming Funds) in roadside, railways, highways, homestead and canal/river bank are especially running well in Bangladesh (Muhammed *et al.* 2005, 2011). A total of 19,790 ha area together with 8,566 km road side plantations established with PF programs were harvested during the 1999 to 2010 period, with huge benefit/ economic returns (Table 3) (BFD 2011).

Table 3: Harvested People-Oriented Forestry Plantation in Bangladesh during 1999 to 2010

Partici- pants involved	Area	Products ('000'm ³)			Benefit/Income (Crore Taka ¹)			
		Timber	Fuelwood	Pole	Total	Partici- pant share	TFF ²	Govt. revenue
85900 Nos.	19790 ha 8566 km							
		12253.40	14641.71	3890.26	296.70	132.39	29.19	132.52

¹US\$≈ 72 Taka¹, 1Crore=10 Million, TFF²= Tree Farming Funds,

Source: BFD (2011)

Recent statistics of Bangladesh Forest Department reveal about 4.65 million ha land is available for PF programs, which is almost 31% of Bangladesh's total land surface area (BFD 2011). This figure can easily show the the future prospects of PF programs in Bangladesh and its significance with regard to economic, social and environmental benefits.

Main Actors in PF Programs

The actors involved in PF programs can be categorized into macro, meso and micro level actors. The key power and policy players include the Ministry of Environment and Forest (MoFE), and Forest Department (FD). The donor also played an influential role over MoEF and FD in order to implement their criteria through funding supports. In the case of the meso level, the local forest office/officials, local political leaders, local elite, timber traders and local institutions (like- NGOs, political office) have immense influence on the implementation of PF activities. Finally the micro level actors are the local communities, tribal people, ethnic minorities, households (all types of general participating people).

Macro Level Actors

In Bangladesh, both the MoEF and FD take part in the planning and decision-making about PF projects. Usually, MoEF coordinates PF projects and donor allocated financial support to the FD guided PF projects in Bangladesh. The FD has decentralized power to the respective Forest Divisional level to initiate PF programs under the Social Forestry Rules (Amended) in 2010 (Bangladesh Gadget 2010) (Figure 2). Each division has several numbers of Range and Beat offices. Finally, either the Range or Beat officer is the responsible person to execute PF activities under the guidance of DFO. Central FD monitors the functioning of divisional forest offices with particular emphasis on formal reports or documents (Local FD Report 2010, Muhammed et al. 2011).

The central Forest Department and their senior officials always wants to see the positive results of PF programs in order to prove that PF programs have huge positive impacts on national development process. However, the real problem or situation has not always reflected by the final project report (Nath and Inoue 2010; Islam and Sato 2010). Even the central FD staffs (top level) have not shown any effective efforts to analyze the real situation or main problems of PF occurring in field (participant) level. In the PF process, the role of MoEF and central FD is basically one of ‘client’ when dealing with donors, and of ‘principal controller’ when interacting with other actors; the situation is more or like similar to Nepal cases described by Khadka (2009). Most important thing is the Forest Department has operated under the control of MoEF. Among this two top level actors, often the central FD is treated as a passive actor in regard to power and the central decision making process. That means most of the cases FD has to maintain the decision taken by MoEF.

Donors are also dominant top level actors in PF activities because most of the funding for PF projects and development budget for the forestry sector over the last 30 years has come from donors in the case of Bangladesh (Muhammed *et al.* 2005; Nath and Inoue 2008) (Ahmed 2008; Nath and Inoue 2010) and Table 4 contains information on the major donor that funded PF projects in Bangladesh. Donors’ role as top level actors has been recognized and maintained through giving other resources in addition to money such as consultation, ideas, aid and materials.

Table 4: Donor Funded Major People-Oriented Forestry Program in Bangladesh

Name	Funding Organization	Duration
Community Forest Project	ADB, WB	1981-1988
Upazila Afforestation and Nursery	ADB	1989-1996

Development Project		
Coastal Green Belt Project	ADB	1995-2002
Forest Resource Management Project: Forest Directorate Component	IDA	1992-2001
Forestry Sector Project	ADB	1998-2004
Thana Afforestation and Nursery Development Project	ADB	1987-1995
Food Assisted Social Forestry Program	WFP	1989~

Source: GOB (2011); Forest Statistics, Bangladesh (2003); Muhammed *et al.* (2005)

For example, during the last 30 years, donors have introduced a lot of ideas in PF development in Bangladesh ranging from resource conservation and development (In 1970s most of the donor funded projects were to conserve biodiversity), establishment of community forestry and formation of coastal greenbelt in the 1980s and 1990s (1980s donor started to funding of PF projects), to poverty alleviation and livelihoods improvement of rural poor in the early 2000s (like- ADB funded PF project at Sal forests area). One thing is very apparent: that the giver always has the upper hand when dealing with the taker; thus, the relationship between giver and taker is dominant and recessive respectively (Eyben 2003). During the funding of PF projects at Madhupur Sal forests area, donor (ADB) has imposed a criterion to introduce fast growing exotic species (like- *Acacia auriculiformis*, *Eucalyptus spp.*) in Sal forests area through different PF/Social Forestry programs. Initially the FD officers did not agree to introduce exotic species in Sal forests area. The donor was strict on the criterion and consequently, the MoEF had carried-out the donor decision and imposed FD to include exotic species in Sal forest area (Gain 2002) (example- in woodlot program). Therefore, the donors (as top level actor) tend to play an influential role over the Bangladesh central government and try to impose their agenda or criteria through allocating money to forestry and development sectors.

Meso Level Actors

People-oriented forest management practices in Bangladesh have created/instituted some new actors especially at the meso level (due to decentralized approach). This study looks at those agents at the meso level who play a crucial role (like- local level decision) in between lower (participants) and top level (central FD) actors. The meso level actors are sometimes building a syndicate (coalition among different mid level actors) and they have a strong influence (like- control the new participation selection process) on lower level actors (Islam and Sato 2010). This study treated the local forest office, mainly the Range and Beat office/officials, as a meso level actor due to their direct interaction with local participants. Often strong

linkages (called syndicate) existed between the local forest officials, local political leader/person, local elites and timber trader regarding PF issues (Islam and Sato 2010). Majority of the local FD staff has been accused by the civil society of being involved in the unfair process (like- illegal money demands from participant) for implementing and the execution of PF activities at local levels (Muhammed *et al.* 2008; Safa 2004; Ahmed 2008; Gain 2002). However, all of the meso level actors have some interests over PF activities, which are related to power, inclusion/exclusion and getting favors from PF activities.

Micro Level Actors

The local people who are involved with the forest management process are the most important lower level actors and direct users of the resources beneficiaries. The term local participant refers to heterogeneous social groups stratified according to caste, income, gender, religion and land ownership (such as landless, marginal, medium and large farmers). The majority of the local participants live in poverty and their per capita income is significantly below the national average (Zashimuddin 2007; Rahmin *et al.* 2007; Islam and Sato 2010). PF approaches put greater emphasis on forest protection and regeneration of new trees, whilst the main target of the participants is about higher income or output. For them, higher income, food security, Non-Timber Forests Products (NTFPs), watershed management and timber collection are more preferable than planting new trees. On the other hand, lack of trust, lack of friendly relationship and interaction between local participants and FD has created severe negative impacts on PF activities in Bangladesh. Due to conflicts on forest user rights, social relationships between FD and local people (forest-dependent) have been deteriorated. Consequently, the antagonistic relationship affected the collective action among different actors (FD and Participants especially) and also affected the common resource management systems (Islam and Sato 2010). However, the FD officials often blame local people for over exploiting and the illegal collection of forest resources; this issue of forest management is a hot topic concerning the community versus state discourse (Shahbaz 2009; Saigal 2000; Timsina 2003). PF activities can trigger new conflicts between local people and FD or cause old conflicts to accumulate/intensify (Castro and Nielsen 2001). However, among , local participants there are issues with fair sharing of development benefits because access to local decision-making process is not equal (Duper and Badenoch 2002).

Besides the above-mentioned actors, there are many NGOs/organizations (meso level actors) working at the local levels. At present there are more than one hundred NGOs in PF activities in Bangladesh, including the leading NGOs; of them BRAC, PROSHIKA, RDRS, TMSS, POUSH (Muhammed *et al.*

2005). The history of NGO involvements in PF activities is not very old. Soon after the liberation war in 1971, the NGOs started their work through the relief and rehabilitation of war victims in several ways. Usually the NGOs have implemented PF activities by their own staff and funds, and, in some cases, they also receive donor funds. However, the NGOs have maintained government prescribed rules and regulations for implementing PF programs. Often NGOs were engaged in plantation activities on private land by leasing/buying lands from the landowners; in some cases they got government land leased for certain periods of time. In Bangladesh, majority of PF programs were implemented by the FD and most of the cases NGOs played the middle level actors roles. However, the main PF activities and their implementation strategies are operated by the FD, and NGOs are the additional actors in this regard (Figure 1).

Actors Interaction and Challenges

This section explores the power relation, policy making space, exclusion and inclusion and institutional aspects of the major actors involved in PF activities. Key actors includes MoEF, FD, donors, local FD, timber traders, local political leaders, the local elite and local institutions.

Power-Relation

There are many ways of looking at power like-capacity, persuasion, strength, to exercise control, etc (Turner 2005; Khadka 2010). For the purpose of this paper, power is considered as a process rather than a resource. That mean power has the capacity or strength to influence the control of resources (Turner 2005). Power dynamics exists only when power is exerted and actualized in action. Most hierarchical organizations, difficulties and obstacles to internal collective action are caused by asymmetries of power and information (Andersson 2004; Ostrom *et al.* 2002; Holmstrom 1982). In the PF programs, power relationships continue to shape the interaction process of different actors (Khadka 2009). Usually the MoEF and FD settled the planning and implementation scheme of PF projects (state funded projects) in Bangladesh, but in the case of donor- funded projects, they might invite other actors like representatives of the civil society. Participating actors (except MoEF and FD) in planning and development meetings realize that they are suppressed or dominated by the central government and donors. Often the local FD and their representatives as a field level PF actor their views are not taken into consideration in PF dialogue. The donor and MoEF present their agenda and dominate the meeting through their controlling ability or strength over other mid level actors. This scenario is very common in developing countries due to the traditional bureaucratic process (central control approach) and situation of Bangladesh, which is more or less similar

to Pakistan and Nepal (Khadka 2009; Shahbaz 2009). The bureaucratic process of Bangladesh PF management has given the sole controlling power/strength to the top level actors and the mid and lower level actors have the responsibility to implement only top level decisions.

The local FD and their representatives feel it is their responsibility to participate in the meeting and give advice and suggestions to the central government about who should participate and what the real problems at the grassroots level of PF programs are. However, government policy makers (top level actors) give lower priority or less emphasis to the ideas of the lower-level staff. The central FD shifted some power to the local FD level, which is not enough to implement PF projects independently. In some cases, donors evaluate the details activities of PF programs and move it to the top-level meeting. In this process, some important adjustments of PF activities were carried out in their next PF projects. If this process is practiced in every aspect of power-relation dynamics and local FD are getting emphasis in policy space, it will be very helpful for planning and effective implementation of PF projects in Bangladesh. That means the central government needs to give devolution of power to the respective lower level in order to improve the whole PF process, but not give emphasis only for formal documentations or reports to assess PF. In one hand, FD had decentralized the power to local level and in other, they have maintained the decision making power to gain control over other actors.

Power relation dynamics are also significant at local FD planning in order to evaluate and select new participants in PF activities. In several cases, it was evident that the local FD always gave space to the local political leaders or elite to shape the PF process. Even in the participant selection process, the local political leaders and elites have influenced the local FD officials, as a result, some non-poor (not eligible for PF) got the PF land (Field Experience from Madhupur Sal forests 2009 & 2010; Safa 2004; Muhammed *et al.* 2008; Islam *et al.* 2010). This type of power-relation dynamics and improper selection of PF participants were discussed in PF literature in Bangladesh perspective (Muhammed *et al.* 2008; Safa 2004; Islam and Sato 2010). In most of the cases, PF activities are treated as a top down approach or execution of order by the lower level staff. However, the practical experiences and problems identified by the lower level actors are not reflected in future PF process. These sorts of activities always created huge challenges for the sustainability of PF.

Policy-Making

Top level actors have the power in which they can control the whole policy towards implementing and executing of PF process in Bangladesh. However, actor perception of PF issues shapes their PF policy process, and

power dynamics place their policies to the PF process. That means those actors who have power are dominating in policy space. It is normal that there are differences between and within actor groups in understanding, evaluating and solving PF practical issues. The interactions of power between actors decide who will be included or excluded from PF planning and which ideas or knowledge will be acknowledged (Khadka 2009). In the case of Bangladesh, the central government has totally controlled the policy space, which is the process of implementing donor agenda and lack of room for others. Most of the time, MoEF and central FD coordinate and organize policy process financed and shaped by donors' funds.

A broad range of actors is involved in PF activities, and each of them is empowered do so by the authorized and policy instruments to implement PF activities. The local FD is one of the mid level actors. In addition, the Range and Beat level officers are responsible for managing and evaluating PF activities in their area. That means the local level forest officials are the key actors to implement and execute PF to the participants level. Although the local FD do not have any scope to shape the PF policy, their practical experience and knowledge might be helpful for future improvements of PF policy. The top-level actors do not want to get any advice or suggestions from the lower level. On the contrary, Bangladeshi bureaucratic process does not have any room for lower level actors to play any role in the PF discussion or planning dialogue. The lower level actors have joined the policy meeting to facilitate top-level decision and order. Therefore, in policy space, it is very important to follow both top-down and bottom-up approach in order to implement an effective future PF policy or planning.

Wardell and Lund (2003) stated that, "laws, regulations and policies do not determine use and access of (forests) resources as such but from a structure of opportunities for negotiations of these rights". The main negotiators are the local FD, and their role is critical in order to manage and conserve Bangladesh forests. For example, the local forest officials are very strict about the ethnic minorities living in Madhupur Sal forests and about the free access rights and collection of NTFPs. On the other hand, their role is not equal when they are treated with local elite or powerful persons on the same issue. As a consequence, the local people have born severe negative attitudes towards FD and their activities (Islam and Sato 2010; Muhammed *et al.* 2008; Ahmed 2008; Gain 2002). Therefore, FD faces challenges in implementing any sort of new management policy into the local level. For example, initially there were no responses by the local people for involvement in PF programs at Madhupur Sal forests area (Muhammed *et al.* 2008). Participants did not trust the local FD staff, and still they were confused whether they would get their exact share/money after completing the PF ten years rotation (Field Experience from Sal forests 2009 & 2010). On the other hand, the forest policy

guideline clearly stated to follow a bottom-up approach, but in practice, the lower level participants are not included in any planning process. As a result, the local people's actual needs and experiences are not properly reflected in the PF policy and planning (Muhammed *et al.* 2005). Therefore, it is very challenging for local FD to execute new PF ideas, and it might affect the sustainability of any PF projects in Bangladesh.

Exclusion and Inclusion

Exclusion can be defined as a complex process having multiple dimensions. In this paper, exclusion refers to both material exclusion from resources/benefits and exclusion from decision/influence making (Silver 2007; Khadka 2009). In PF process, exclusion is commonly expressed as reduced access to common resources, benefits of forest management and development opportunities. Exclusion is also articulated as limited decision making power on the part of poor participants or forest dependent people who rely on forest resources for their livelihoods. On the contrary, inclusion in the PF process generally refers to access in natural resources, benefits of forest production and management opportunities and dominant decision-making process of non-poor (not eligible for PF) who are preferably rich people in the community. So, the issue of exclusion and inclusion is a very important aspect in PF activities in Bangladesh.

In 1950, the government approved the "East Bengal State Acquisition and Tenancy Act" (EBSATC) (Alam *et al.* 2008; Salam and Noguchi 2005) by which all forestland came under the control of the Forest Department, and as a consequence, private ownership of forest land was abolished. Since then, FD has wielded supreme power to manage and control all of Bangladesh forestland. Lots of ethnic minorities have been living within forests from time immemorial (Gain 2002), and the FD had tried to exclude them from the forests. For example, in Madhupur Sal Forest, local FD has moved ethnic minority from forestland and introduced PF activities in their living area, which brings lots of conflicts between the two actors (Gain 2002, 2005, 2007; Field Experience 2009 & 2010). Although the local FD has engaged some ethnic minorities in PF activities, the ethnic community does not have the land owner/access rights like before. Further, in PF programs the local participants have to manage and control resources according to FD imposed guidelines, and traditional knowledge has somehow been excluded in this management process. In some cases, PF decision-making processes have created a lot of conflict between local people and FD, which caused a huge negative impact to the future existence of PF programs (Islam and Sato 2010). In Bangladesh, usually the participants who do not have any social power are excluded in PF local level planning and the decision-making process (Muhammed *et al.* 2008, Gain 2002; Expert Opinion 2010). They are not even

included in any forests management and production opportunities (Gain 2002). Moreover, the participant selection processes of local FD level are somehow controversial and unfair (Safa 2004; Muhammed *et al.* 2008), and these systems easily enhanced the exclusion of the local people from PF and natural resource management.

While local poor people are often excluded from PF opportunities, some of the local elite is included. According to Social Forestry Rules 2004, new participants become those people who are living within one square kilometer of PF areas. In addition, the landless people, people having land less than 50 decimal, destitute women, unprivileged groups, poor tribal people, poor forest dependent people and poor freedom fighters or their family members get priority to be included in PF programs (Bangladesh Gadget 2010). These rules should clearly articulate the inclusion of the local poor, and there is no room for non-poor in the PF process. However, in reality, these rules might not be executed properly, and the local FD together with other meso level actors should allow the inclusion of rich people in the PF process. In field experience in the Madhupur Sal Forest area, it was clearly showed that there are many non-poor included in the PF process, whereas many real poor people do not have the scope to be included in this process (Islam *et al.* 2010). This situation is also common in other parts of the country (Safa 2004; Muhammed *et al.* 2008; Gain 2002) and the local FD staff members are the key actors to exercise the malpractice of the exclusion and inclusion issue in PF (Expert Opinion 2010). However, exclusion and inclusion are also present at the top level of the PF process. With the political power, the central government always shows favor to their parties of people working in FD and always tries to give emphasis to the politically biased people in the PF policy/planning process. Often people with strong forestry background and experienced professional foresters were excluded, and comparatively lower professional background foresters were included in the PF process due to their political background (Knox 2009; Khan 2005). Therefore, it is necessary to follow and practice proper rules and avoid the bad practice of inclusion and exclusion in the PF process, which can easily conquer major difficulties of PF programs in Bangladesh.

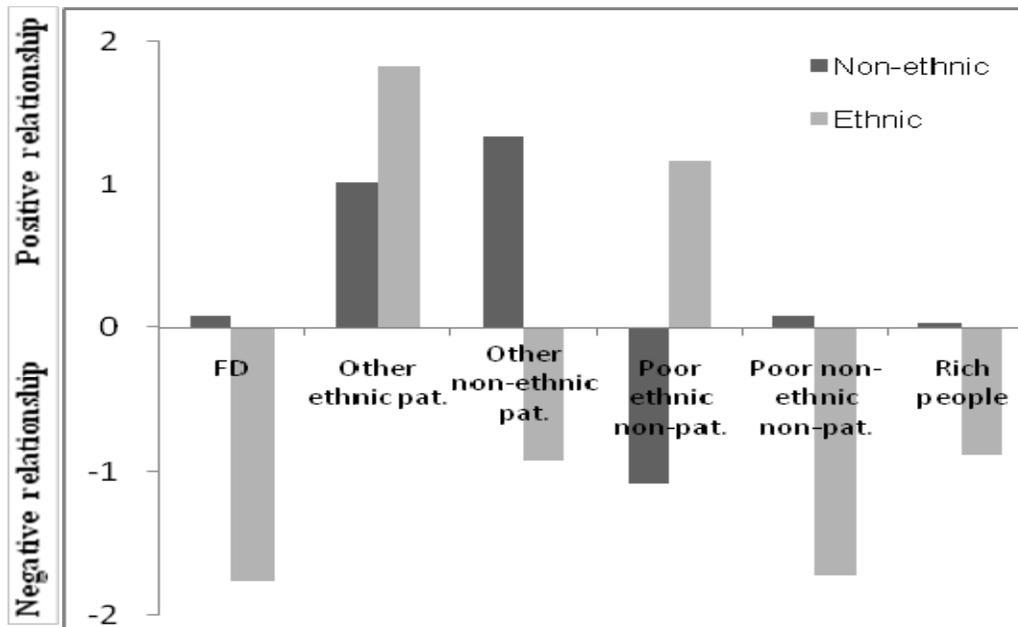
Institutional Factors

This section mainly focuses on North (1990) concept, in particular the main actors (FD) who have the supreme power in the PF process and their interactions to other actors. In Bangladesh, PF is treated as a rising and beneficial sector (Muhammed *et al.* 2005), and due to its overwhelming interests, different actors may be included in this process (Larson and Ribot 2007). Local poor people get involved in the PF process to improve their livelihood status, whilst the non-poor think that they might get some

additional economic benefits beyond what is essential for their livelihoods. Meso level actors, such as local political leaders, the elite, trader and local institutions make liaison with locals of the FD due to their versatile interest over PF programs. Local political leaders and the elite try to influence local FD officers to take PF decision in favor of them, such as including their family members or relatives or their neighbors who are usually not eligible for PF participants. Sometimes they took illegal money from the poor people in order to involve them in the PF process (Gain 2002; Ahmed 2008; Islam *et al.* 2010; Islam and Sato 2010). Further, PF trees final sales are processed by the government (so called auction procedure) in which the local elite, political leaders, and timber traders make negotiations or make syndicates (Islam *et al.* 2010). Such a syndicate would control the timber auction process and always set the timber price less than the original market price (Islam *et al.* 2010). Further, the local FD often takes bribes from timber traders and do favors for their business (Ahmed 2008; Gain 2002; Islam and Sato 2010; Islam *et al.* 2010). Local participants have always been afraid about such syndicates due to their fear that their PF agreements will not continue for the next term (Field Experience at Madhupur Sal Forest 2009 & 2010). On the other hand, local organizations often made liaisons with the FD staff and they leased government land in favor of them. In this leased land, they implemented social forestry activities involving local poor people. Often the NGOs or other organizations got land from the central or local government level and executed social forestry activities by involving local communities. In this process the organization got some benefits, but their PF process is much fairer than the FD patronized process. Another type of interest existed among the FD, which was to gain maximum revenue from PF programs. For example, the FD tried to implement woodlot (a participatory forestry program) rather than agroforestry program in Madhupur Sal forests area to generate more revenue from woodlot programs. However, the participants always wanted to participate in agroforestry compared to woodlot programs because in agroforestry programs, participants got better crop output and subsistence income throughout the whole year (Islam and Sato 2010).

The relationship between local FD and participants is the key to implementing and executing PF programs successfully (Nath and Inoue 2010; Muhammed *et al.* 2008; Safa 2004; Salam and Nogushi 2005). Due to conflict with local community in land tenure, free access and other issues, the local FD has received little acceptance by the local community (Ahmed 2008; Gain 2002). In a field research at the Madhupur Sal forests area, Islam and Sato (2010) visualized the social relationship among the PF participants and other community together with the FD (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Overall Social Relationship of Participants of the Community



The figure clearly shows that participants have expressed their worst negative relationship toward the local FD. The author also discussed that a poor relationship has strongly affected the participants' social capital as well as prospects of PF programs. In PF literature it was also found that participants might illegally cut their PF trees before completing the PF cycle, and this happened mainly due to the lack of trust and poor relationship with the local FD (Gain 2002; Muhammed *et al.* 2008; Islam and Sato 2010). Even the relationship between the top level and lower level FD staff was a classic example of the bureaucratic system; in this process, the lower level staff only executed the order from the upper level. The two-way friendly communication and relationships among the lower and upper level staffs are very crucial in order to implement PF programs. Therefore, the negative relationship within different actors makes this process more challenging and complicated.

Conclusion

Considering the economic and environmental needs, people-oriented forestry has taken hold as a main forestry paradigm in Bangladesh, and there is no doubt about its acceptance among the local communities. While the results of this study are indicative rather than conclusive, still they outline many unresolved problems embedded in current practices. It is very clear that the people-oriented forestry programs, such as participatory forestry or

social forestry have not managed to solve the dissonance between theory and reality. A people-oriented forestry approach must need to overcome the power-relation and interests of the involved actors before actual implementation. The major difficulty is that unequal power relations and social conflicts are quite common among various actors involved in PF programs. These difficulties can be minimized if real devolution of power takes place between the state actors and participants. This means as a key actor, the forest department's role must be a facilitator rather than dictator, and they have to build a good relationship and trust with the participants. On the other hand, the local forest officials' role towards handling the local elites, political leaders, timber traders and other powerful actors must be trustworthy to the local people. It is unlikely that top forest officials still have to maintain classical bureaucratic approaches to impose any PF policy to the local level and neglect the practical experience of lower level staff. In conclusion, it is arguable that the power relation and actors' interaction at different levels of PF planning and execution impacts negatively on the participants and their perceptions towards this program. To be better adjusted to the local context, and thus more feasible in the longer term, people-oriented forest management needs to follow effective environmental laws along with strong commitments from all key actors especially meso level actors.

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