

ABSTRACT

1. Bangladesh is the most densely populated delta in the world. Per capita land is the lowest except some city-based countries like Singapore. Per capita arable land has already reached to an alarming position; with only 0.1483 acres. The proportion of per capita land and per capita arable land is the highest (63%) in comparison to the world figure. Cultivable land is losing its fertility due to over exploitation. On the other hand agricultural land is decreasing and 3 million people are being annually added to existing 140 million people.

2. There is a tremendous pressure on land for ever-increasing population, to provide spaces for their work, residence and other related purposes. It is estimated that about 55 per cent of the total effective land is under cultivation. The marginal and sub-marginal lands have already been brought under cultivation. Though it is said that 17 percent of the total land area is under the forests, in reality it is much lower. This decline in the forestland has serious impact on the overall environment in the form of green house effect, soil erosion, and desertification; reduce of availability of timber and fuel wood etc.

3. Against the backdrop, this study aims at analyzing from issues. First, it examines the macro trends of land-use in Bangladesh. Secondly it compares the macro-trends with actual trends at field level. A field study of land use on the basis of plot-to-plot cadastral survey was undertaken in Muradpur mouza in Chittagong city. Selected respondents from this mouza were also interviewed to assess the awareness of the stakeholders about the emerging issues in land. Thirdly, some preliminary estimates on the requirement of land for the current population in Bangladesh were made. These estimates suggest an urgent need for land-use planning in Bangladesh. Finally, the major issues relating to land-use planning are examined in the study.

4. An analysis of macro trends suggests an ever-widening gap between the demand for land and the actual supply of land. The actual amount of land needed for a healthy environment is not easy to calculate. In comparison to world standard Bangladesh has only 19.79% land needed for a sustainable society. On the basis of per capita arable land (0.1483 acre) Bangladesh has 20.82 million acres of cultivable land to feed 140 million people. The 'net cropped area' is 35.13 million acres, which is the aggregation of single, double and triple cropped land. So land scarcity remains a major problem for the economy.

5. Macro trends are consistent with experience of field survey. A field survey in the Muradpur mouza of Chittagong City Corporation area shows that

agricultural land, hills, forest, wetlands are rapidly shifting into nonagricultural land, especially into residential plots. From a balanced environmental point of view the per capita land & forest is dwindling in the study area. Wanton destruction of hills & natural drainage system and unplanned settlements has created dislocations in the lives of inhabitants. Water logging, land-slide, insufficiency of floor space are some of them. The rapid expansion of population and urbanization has contributed to significant increase in the area under non-agricultural use. More alarming than the decrease in cultivated land is environmental degradation. Ever mounting demand has rendered land; a precious resource. The residential plot size is decreasing and high-rise apartments are increasing continuously.

6. At present Government interventions and activities together with private sector initiatives govern the land use pattern. As far as the land management is concerned there are large numbers of government ministries, directorates, city corporations, district administration, pourashavas, thana parishad, union parishad, etc are involved in the management of land both in rural and urban areas. No single agency is responsible for the execution of any project of land policy or administration. The responsibilities of each of these agencies are not clearly spelt out.

7. The study shows that sufficient legal steps were not taken to regulate the proper use of land. In reality the existing provisions are not only ineffective, but they are also quite inadequate. The biggest obstacle to preservation of agricultural land for purely agricultural use is the alluring prices offered by those wishing to convert such land to non-agricultural uses. It was observed that the best agricultural land was offered very high prize tempting poor agriculturalists to sell their land to industrialists and house-builders.

8. The study also suggests that most people consider land matters & land laws as complex issues and do not take active interest in land issues. Bangladesh has adopted a 'National Land Use Policy' in 2001. One of the principal objectives of the policy is to make efficient use of this finite land resource. People's awareness is the main tool to achieve the goal. Present study illustrates that more than 91% respondents did not hear about 'The National Land Use Policy'. People awareness about the importance of land use policy is an essential precondition for its success.