HOMESTEAD FORESTRY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT: 
A SOCIO-EMPIRICAL STUDY OF BANGLADESH

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requirements for the degree of

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Abstract

This thesis is concerned with the role of homestead forests in the development of poor, labour surplus economies. The term 'homestead forest' refers to the collection of vegetation - trees, plants, herbs, creepers and others - which almost all rural households in Bangladesh grow, for their own use as well as for sale, using the land in and around their homesteads and dwellings. The term 'development' encompasses economic, social, cultural and ecological aspects of countries. The thesis therefore examines the role of homestead forests in this wider context.

It starts by reviewing the existing theoretical literature on development drawing on the works of sociologists, social anthropologists, development economists, geographers and others. It argues that many of the theories do not fit the particular conditions of the very poor agriculture-dependent economies such as Bangladesh. This study therefore advances the hypotheses that of 'non-conventional' approaches involving the development of the resources of homestead forests in the rural areas would go a long way towards assisting the poor, landless masses of Bangladesh. An extensive survey of the many and varied uses of homestead forests is undertaken to support these hypotheses on the basis of direct observation and experience. To give further content to the hypotheses, village surveys were undertaken in carefully selected areas of Bangladesh. With the help of scientifically formulated questionnaires the situation of the rural people of the selected villages was examined. This helped to identify the many causes of poverty and helplessness among the rural poor. The methods of survival were also focused on in these surveys of the rural people. It became clear that homestead forests play a major role in the lives and livelihoods of the rural people. The question why the large scale forestry development programmes did not help the rural poor also figured in this investigation. It was found that the large scale commercial types of forests deny access to the majority of the rural people, while homestead forests, being directly owned and controlled by the people, provide them with much needed support. It is true that such support, however valuable, is still inadequate. It is also unevenly distributed among the rural people. The survey therefore looked at the distributional aspects of homestead forestry resources within the survey villages. The findings confirm the need to strengthen this valuable resource base in rural Bangladesh if widespread poverty, and its inevitable concomitant, social and political unrest and instability are to be attacked.

The study ends with a number of recommendations to make the changes necessary for more efficient utilization of the homestead forestry resources for the benefit directly of the poor and, indirectly, the rest of society as well.
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ABSTRACT | ii |
| ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS | iii |
| TABLE OF CONTENTS | v |
| LIST OF TABLES | xvii |
| LIST OF MAPS | xx |
| LIST OF FIGURES | xxi |

## CHAPTER ONE: HOMESTEAD FORESTS IN CONTEXT

1.1 INTRODUCTION ...................................................... 1

1.2 THE PLACE OF FORESTRY IN THE EARLY CIVILIZATION OF THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT: A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY ............................................................. 5

1.3 FOREST RELATED RESEARCH .......................................... 7

1.4 FORESTRY AND RURAL DEVELOPMENT ................................. 9

1.4.1 Local Resources, Social Structure and the Development Perspectives: An Overview ...................................................... 9

1.4.2 Agricultural Development and Deforestation .................... 12

1.4.3 Rural Development Programmes and the Poor: A Review ..... 13

1.4.4 Development Programmes and the Contingency and Emergency Needs of the Poor ...................................................... 15

1.4.5 Basic Needs, Homestead Forests and the Rural Poor .......... 15

1.5 THE PLACE OF HOMESTEAD FORESTRY IN FORESTRY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES ............................................................. 17

1.6 FOREST MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS AND POLICIES .................... 18

1.6.1 The Period Prior to European Rule .............................. 18

1.6.2 Forest Management Under British Rule .......................... 19
3.3 CATEGORISATION OF SURVEY FINDINGS .......... 61

3.3.1 Categorisation of Respondents: The Contribution of Related Research .......... 61

3.3.2 The Household as a Unit of Reference .......... 63

3.4 PROPOSITIONS AND HYPOTHESES .......... 65

3.4.1 The Purposes .......... 65

3.4.2 The Specific Propositions and Hypotheses .......... 66

Proposition One .......... 66
Hypotheses 1.1 to 1.3 .......... 66
Hypotheses 1.4 to 1.6 .......... 67
Proposition Two .......... 67
Hypotheses 2.1 to 2.2 .......... 67
Hypothesis 2.3 .......... 68
Proposition Three .......... 68
Hypotheses 3.1 to 3.2 .......... 68
Proposition Four .......... 69
Hypotheses 4.1 to 4.3 .......... 69
Proposition Five .......... 70
Hypotheses 5.1 to 5.3 .......... 70
Proposition Six .......... 70
Hypothesis 6.1 .......... 71
Proposition Seven .......... 71
Hypothesis 7.1 .......... 71
Hypothesis 7.2 .......... 72
3.5 THE GEO-POLITICAL, ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS OF BANGLADESH

3.5.1 The Geo-political Location and Area

3.5.2 The Climate and Seasons

3.5.3 A Brief History

3.5.4 The River Systems

3.5.5 The Economy

3.6 THE SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILES OF SURVEY VILLAGES

3.6.1 Village One

3.6.2 Village Two

3.6.3 Village Three

3.6.4 Village Four

3.7 VILLAGE PROFILES: A SUMMARY

CHAPTER FOUR: HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION AND THE HOMESTEAD FOREST

4.1 INTRODUCTION

4.2 HOUSEHOLD CONSUMPTION OF FUEL

4.2.1 Fuel: The Present Situation

4.2.2 The Regional Pattern

4.2.3 Fuel Scarcity, Causes and Consequences: A Brief Overview

4.2.4 The Importance of Homestead Forests as a Source of Traditional Fuel: Some Economic and Social Aspects

4.3 HOMESTEAD FORESTS AND FOOD

4.3.1 The Variations in Forest Provisions between Non-poor and Poor and between Villages
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3.2</td>
<td>The Variation in Forest Food Provisions between Non-poor and Poor and between Villages</td>
<td>118</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.3.3</td>
<td>The Importance of Homestead Forest Food</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>HOMESTEAD FOREST AND FODDER</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.1</td>
<td>Survey Findings</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4.2</td>
<td>The Importance of Homestead Forest Fodder</td>
<td>125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>HOMESTEAD FORESTS AND THE HOUSE BUILDING MATERIALS</td>
<td>126</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>HOMESTEAD FOREST AND BOUNDARY MATERIALS</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.1</td>
<td>Survey Findings</td>
<td>131</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6.2</td>
<td>The Significance of Homestead Boundaries</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>INCOME FROM FRUIT</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2.1</td>
<td>Household Income from Fruit</td>
<td>137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT FOR FRUIT TRADERS</td>
<td>143</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.1</td>
<td>Village One</td>
<td>145</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.2</td>
<td>Village Two</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.3</td>
<td>Village Three</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3.4</td>
<td>Village Four</td>
<td>148</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>INCOME FROM HOMESTEAD FORESTS AS TIMBER</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.1</td>
<td>Household Income from Homestead Forests as Timber</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.2</td>
<td>Village One</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4.3</td>
<td>Village Two</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.4.4 Village Three .......................................................... 152
5.4.5 Village Four .......................................................... 152
5.5 INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT FOR TREE TRADERS .......... 154
5.5.1 Village One .......................................................... 154
5.5.2 Village Two .......................................................... 155
5.5.3 Village Three .......................................................... 156
5.5.4 Village Four .......................................................... 157
5.6 INCOME FROM BAMBOO .............................................. 157
5.6.1 Income from Bamboo in Different Survey Villages .......... 159
5.7 INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT FOR BAMBOO TRADERS ....... 160
5.8 INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT FROM TREE BRANCHES, TWIGS AND LEAVES ................................................. 161
5.9 INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT FROM CARPENTRY ............... 165
5.10 INCOME AND EMPLOYMENT FROM SMALL-SCALE FOREST-BASED PROCESSING ENTERPRISES ................................. 167
5.11 SUMMARY ............................................................ 170

CHAPTER SIX:  HOMESTEAD FORESTS, EMERGENCY AND CONTINGENCY SITUATIONS .... 184
6.1 INTRODUCTION ......................................................... 184
6.2 WEDDING EXPENDITURE AND HOMESTEAD FORESTS: A BRIEF OVERVIEW ..................... 187
6.2.1 Wedding Expenditure: The Survey Findings .................. 191
6.2.2 Village One ......................................................... 192
6.2.3 Village Two ......................................................... 194
6.2.4 Village Three ....................................................... 196
6.2.5 Village Four ....................................................... 198
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.2.6</td>
<td>The Economic and Social Obligations of Weddings and</td>
<td>200</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>the Role of Homestead Forests in Meeting Such</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Obligations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>THE ROLE OF HOMESTEAD FORESTS ON CONTINGENCIES</td>
<td>204</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.1</td>
<td>Survey Findings</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.2</td>
<td>House Building, Repairs and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.3</td>
<td>Food, Other Daily Essentials and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.4</td>
<td>Agricultural Inputs and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.5</td>
<td>Education Expenses and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.6</td>
<td>Clothing and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>206</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.7</td>
<td>Sickness, Treatment and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.8</td>
<td>Credit Repayment and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.9</td>
<td>Civil/Criminal Cases and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.10</td>
<td>Land Purchase, Land Lease and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.3.11</td>
<td>Miscellaneous Expenditure and Homestead Forests</td>
<td>212</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>EMERGENCY DISASTERS AND HOMESTEAD FORESTS</td>
<td>213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.1</td>
<td>Disasters, Famines and the Role of Forests: An Overview</td>
<td>214</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.2</td>
<td>Natural Disasters and Coping Mechanisms in Rural</td>
<td>218</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Bangladesh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.3</td>
<td>Disasters and Coping Mechanisms: Official Data and</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Brief Historical Review</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.4</td>
<td>Village One</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.5</td>
<td>Village Two</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.6</td>
<td>Village Three</td>
<td>222</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4.7</td>
<td>Village Four</td>
<td>223</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.4.8 Disasters Experienced by Rural People: Survey Findings ........................................ 223
6.4.9 Disasters and Coping Mechanisms of Rural People: Survey Findings ........................................ 226
6.5 SUMMARY .......................................................................................................................... 230

CHAPTER SEVEN: HOMESTEAD FORESTS, WOMEN AND DEVELOPMENT ........................................ 234

7.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................................................................................... 234
7.2 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FORESTRY: A BRIEF HISTORICAL SURVEY ........................................ 235
7.3 WOMEN, DEVELOPMENT AND FORESTRY: AN OVERVIEW ........................................ 236
7.4 THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN FORESTS: A BRIEF SURVEY OF LITERATURE AND VILLAGE FINDINGS .............. 241
7.4.1 The Planting Activities: An Overview ............................................................................. 241
7.4.2 The Planting Activities: Survey Findings ........................................................................ 241
7.4.3 The Management Activities: Survey Findings .................................................................. 244
7.4.4 The Fuel Collection Activities: A Brief Overview ............................................................ 246
7.4.5 The Fuel Collection Activities: Survey Findings ............................................................. 247
7.4.6 The Food Gathering Activities: An Overview ................................................................. 250
7.4.7 The Food Gathering Activities: Survey Findings ............................................................. 252
7.4.8 Fodder Gathering Activities: A Brief Overview ............................................................... 254
7.4.9 Fodder Gathering Activities: Survey Findings ............................................................... 254
7.5 MISCELLANEOUS ACTIVITIES: THE ROLE OF WOMEN .............................................. 256
7.6 HOMESTEAD FORESTS: LOW WORKLOAD FOR WOMEN ............................................. 257
7.7 SUMMARY CONCLUSION ............................................................................................... 259
CHAPTER EIGHT: HOMESTEAD FORESTS: A TREASURE HOUSE OF MEDICINAL TREES, HERBS AND PLANTS FOR PRIMARY HEALTH CARE IN RURAL BANGLADESH

8.1 INTRODUCTION ............................................ 265

8.2 ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL STUDIES OF ETHNO-MEDICINE AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE .......... 267

8.3 HOMESTEAD FORESTS AND THEIR WELFARE ROLE FOR SOCIAL MEDICINE ............................................. 272

8.4 CONTEMPORARY ATTITUDE TO HERBAL AND OTHER 'NATURE CURES' .............................................. 275

8.5 TRADITIONAL MEDICINE AND HOMESTEAD FORESTRY IN BANGLADESH ........................................... 277

8.5.1 Homestead Forests and Their Welfare Role as Traditional Medicine in Rural Bangladesh: A Brief Historical Overview ............................................. 277

8.5.2 The Role of Herbal Medicine in Primary Health Care: Survey Findings .............................................. 280

8.5.3 Herbal Medicine, Income and Employment .............................................. 287

8.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS .............................................. 288

CHAPTER NINE: HOMESTEAD FORESTS: SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND ENVIRONMENTAL SIGNIFICANCE .......... 295

PART ONE .............................................. 295

9.1 INTRODUCTION .............................................. 295

9.2 SOCIAL ANTHROPOLOGICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RITUAL, BELIEFS, MYTHS, CUSTOMS, FESTIVALS AND CEREMONIAL ACTIVITIES RELATED TO TREES AND TREE PRODUCTS: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW .............................................. 296

9.3 THE SOCIAL AND CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF RITUALS, BELIEFS, MYTHS, CUSTOMS, FESTIVALS AND LEGENDS OF BANGLADESHI RURAL SOCIETY: AN OVERVIEW .............................................. 298
9.4 THE SYMBOLIC AND SACRED SIGNIFICANCE OF TREES ... 300

9.5 THE IMPORTANCE OF FORESTS AND FOREST PRODUCTS AS A LOCATION FOR SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES ................................................................. 305

9.5.1 Hindu Maha-sankranti and Fruit Ritual ...................... 306
9.5.2 Sacrifice of Animals and Related Ritual ..................... 306
9.5.3 Fasting and Fruit Ritual ........................................ 307
9.5.4 Herb Ritual and the Birth of a Baby .......................... 307
9.5.5 New Born and Wood Fire Ritual ............................... 308
9.5.6 Death and Plant Rituals ........................................ 308
9.5.7 Death and Leaf Ritual .......................................... 309
9.5.8 Diseases, Illnesses and Rituals ............................... 309
9.5.9 Rain and Tree Rituals ......................................... 310
9.5.10 Fertility and Fruit Ritual .................................... 311
9.5.11 Women, Trees and Taboo ..................................... 311
9.5.12 Betrothal, Marriages and Tree Ritual ....................... 312

9.6 THE IMPORTANCE OF HOMESTEAD TREES, FRUIT AND FRUIT PRODUCTS IN THE BENGALI FESTIVAL CALENDAR ................................................................. 316

9.6.1 Vaisak: The Month of New Year ............................... 316
9.6.2 Jyaistha: The Month of Seasonal Fruit ...................... 317
9.6.3 Ashrah: The Month of Jackfruit ................................ 318
9.6.4 Sravan: The Month of Womens' Activity ...................... 319
9.6.5 Bhadra: The Month of Fruit Cakes ............................ 319
9.6.6 Ashhin: The Month of Hindu Festival .......................... 320
9.6.7 Kartik: The Month of Hindu Worship ......................... 320
9.6.8 Agrahayan: The Month of Harvesting .................. 320
9.6.9 Poush and Magh: The Months of Date Palm ............ 321
9.6.10 Phalgun: The Month of Fuel Collection ................ 322
9.6.11 Chaitro: The Month of Planting Trees .................. 322
9.7 SOCIAL GATHERINGS AND HOMESTEAD TREES ............. 322
9.8 SUMMARY ................................................. 323

PART TWO .................................................. 324

9.9 HOMESTEAD FORESTS: THE PROTECTOR OF THE PHYSICAL AND RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT ................ 324
9.10 THE SOCIOLOGICAL AND ANTHROPOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF NATURAL INGREDIENTS IN PROTECTING THE PHYSICAL AND RESIDENTIAL ENVIRONMENT: AN OVERVIEW ......................... 324
9.11 THE NATURAL ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT OF THE INDIAN SUB-CONTINENT: A BRIEF HISTORICAL OVERVIEW ..................... 327
9.12 HOMESTEAD FORESTS AND ENVIRONMENT: SURVEY FINDINGS .......................... 328
   9.12.1 Homestead Forests and a Habitable Climate ............ 329
   9.12.2 Homestead Forests and Energy .......................... 330
   9.12.3 Homestead Forests and Human Benefits .................. 330
   9.12.4 Homestead Forests and Biotic Environment .............. 331
   9.12.5 Homestead Forests and the Character of Human Habitation 332
   9.12.6 Forest Conditions, Food and Drinks ..................... 332
   9.12.7 Forest Conditions and Local Economy .................... 333
9.13 SUMMARY ................................................. 333
CHAPTER TEN: SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 INTRODUCTION ........................................ 336
10.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS .................................. 338
  10.2.1 SURVEY FINDINGS .................................. 340
10.3 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS ............................... 345
10.4 CONCLUSION ............................................. 350

REFERENCES AND EXTENDED BIBLIOGRAPHY ............... 352

GLOSSARY OF BENGALI WORDS AND TERMS USED IN THE STUDY ................................ 377

APPENDICES ............................................. 388
APPENDIX 1 .............................................. 388
APPENDIX 2 .............................................. 392
APPENDIX 3 .............................................. 395
LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1.1 Important Topographical Features of the Selected Villages .... 53

Table 3.6.1 Average Cultivable Land (in hectares) Owned by Survey Households: A Summary Table ......................... 91

Table 3.6.2 Average Homestead Land (in hectares) Owned by Survey Households: A Summary Table ......................... 92

Table 3.6.3 Percentage Distribution of Occupational Status (principal) of Survey Respondents: A Comparison Between Households and Villages .................................. 92

Table 3.6.4 Literacy Rate of Survey Respondents: A Summary Table ........ 93

Table 3.6.5 Average Number of Cattle Owned by Survey Households: A Summary Table ............................................. 93

Table 4.2.1 Percentage Share of Households Using Fuel Items for Domestic Cooking ................................................. 103

Table 4.2.2 Percentage Share of Villages Used Fuel Items for Domestic Cooking ....................................................... 105

Table 4.2.3 The Consequences of Fuel Scarcity for the Survey Households: A Summary ................................................. 107

Table 4.2.4 The Scarcity of Fuel and Its Consequences at the Village Level: A Comparative Summary ................................ 107

Table 4.3.1 Mean Number of Trees, Plants and Bamboo Clumps in Survey Villages .................................................. 115

Table 4.3.2 Mean Number of Trees, Plants and Bamboo Clumps Owned by Households of Different Incomes ..................... 116

Table 4.3.3 Mean Number of Trees, Plants and Bamboo Clumps Owned by Respondents: Village Wide Figures ..................... 117

Table 4.3.4 Percentage Distribution of Households Using Forest Foods for Family Consumption .................................... 118

Table 4.3.5 Percentage Distribution of Villages Using Forest Products for Family Consumption .................................... 119
Table 4.3.6  Percentage Distribution of Different Income Households Relying on Homestead Forests as Occasional Snack or Breakfast ........................................ 120

Table 4.3.7  Percentage Distribution of Survey Villages Relying on Homestead Forest Foods as Edible Items ................................. 121

Table 4.4.1  Percentage Share of Households Using Homestead Forest Fodder for Many Purposes .................................................. 124

Table 4.4.2  Percentage Share of Villages Using Homestead Forest Fodder for Many Purposes ..................................................... 125

Table 4.5.1  Percentage Share of Survey Households Using Different Items as Structure of House Roof ........................................ 128

Table 4.5.2  Percentage Share of Villages Using Different Items as Structure of House Roof ..................................................... 129

Table 4.5.3  Percentage Share of Households Using Different Items as Wall of Their Main House .................................................... 130

Table 4.5.4  Percentage Share of Households Using Different Items as Wall of Main House ..................................................... 131

Table 4.6.1  Percentage Share of Households Using Different Items as Boundary Wall Around Their Homesteads ............................. 132

Table 4.6.2  Percentage Share of Villages Using Different Items as Boundary Wall Around Their Homesteads ............................. 133

Table 5.2.1  Percentage Distribution of Households With Incomes from Fruit ................................................................. 140

Table 5.2.2  Average Annual Income from Fruit for Households ................................................................. 142

Table 5.4.1  Percentage Distribution of Households With Income from Timber ................................................................. 153

Table 5.6.1  Percentage Distribution of Households With Incomes from Bamboo ................................................................. 160

Table 5.8.1  Percentage Distribution of Households With Incomes from Tree Branches ............................................................. 164

Table 6.3.1  The Economic Status of Households and Their Reliance on Homestead Forests for Household Contingencies: Summary Findings ................................................................. 213
Table 6.4.1 Percentage Distribution of Survey Households Suffering from Disasters Since 1971 ........................................ 225
Table 6.4.2 Percentage Distribution of Households Adapting Different Strategies During Disasters .................................................. 228
Table 6.4.3 Percentage Distribution of Resources Utilized During Disasters: A Summary .............................................................. 230
Table 7.4.1 Percentage Distribution of Household Members Participating in the Planting of Homestead Trees of Different Economic Status ........................................................................ 242
Table 7.4.2 Percentage Distribution of Household Members Participating in the Planting of Homestead Trees by Households of Different Villages ........................................................................ 243
Table 7.4.3 Percentage Distribution of Household Members Participating in the Management of Homestead Trees by Economic Status of Their Households .......................................................... 244
Table 7.4.4 Percentage Distribution of Household Members Participating in the Management of Homestead Trees by Households of Different Villages: A Summary .......................................................... 245
Table 8.5.1 Respondents' Source of Knowledge About Plant Medicine: Village Wide Comparison ................................................. 282
Table 8.5.2 Respondents' Source of Knowledge About Plant Medicine: Household Percentage ......................................................... 283
Table 8.5.3 Households Using Various Treatment Methods: Village Wide Percentage ................................................................. 283
Table 8.5.4 Treatment Methods Used by Different Households: Percentage Distribution ................................................................. 284
Table 8.5.5 Plant Medicine Usage for Treatment of Common Diseases by Different Households: Percentage Distribution ......................................................... 285
Table 8.5.6 Plant Medicines Usage for Treatment of Common Diseases in Different Villages: Percentage Distribution ......................................................... 286
Table 9.5.1 Trees and Their Social, Cultural and Religious Uses by Bangladeshi Rural Hindus and Muslims: A Summary ............ 314
LIST OF MAPS

MAP 1: THE LOCATIONS OF STUDY VILLAGES IN BANGLADESH . 76
MAP 2  THE MAP OF VILLAGE 1 ........................................ 77
MAP 3: THE MAP OF VILLAGE 2 ........................................ 81
MAP 4: THE MAP OF VILLAGE 3 ........................................ 85
MAP 5: THE MAP OF VILLAGE 4 ........................................ 88
LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 4.2.1 Item Used as Cooking Fuel ........................................... 100
Figure 4.2.2 Products Used as Cooking Items ........................................ 101
Figure 5.2.1 Households With Cash Incomes from Fruit ............................. 138
Figure 5.2.2 Incomes of Respondent Households from Fruit in Villages .......... 139
Figure 5.4.1 Incomes of Respondent Households from Timber in Each Village .................................................. 154
Figure 5.6.1 Households With Incomes from Bamboo ................................. 159
Figure 5.8.1 Incomes of Respondent Households from Tree Branches ............. 162
Figure 5.8.2 Income of Households from Tree Branches in Each Village ........ 164
Figure 6.2.1 Wedding Expenses from Homestead Forests ............................ 191
Figure 6.4.1 Households Affected by Disasters .................................... 226
Figure 6.4.2 Coping Strategy During Disasters (as percentage of total) ............ 227
Figure 6.4.3 Resources Utilized by Rich Income Households During Disasters .... 229
Figure 6.4.4 Resources Utilized by Middle Income Households During Disaster .... 229
Figure 6.4.5 Resources Utilized by Poor Income Households During Disaster ...... 230
Figure 7.4.1 Females Participated in Planting and Management of Trees ............ 243
Figure 7.4.2 Mean Hours Spent in Fuel Collection by Household Members ........ 248
Figure 7.4.3 Average Quantity of Fuel Collected Weekly by Household Members .... 249
Figure 7.4.4 Time Spent in Fodder Collection: Comparison Among Households .... 255
Figure 7.4.5 Time Spent in Fodder Collection: Village Wide Comparison ........................................... 255

Figure 8.5.1 Respondent's Knowledge About the Source of Plant Medicine: Village Percentage ........................................... 281

Figure 8.5.2 Respondent's Knowledge About Plant Medicine: Household Percentage ........................................... 281