



Forest Department: Governance Challenges and Way Forward

Extended Executive Summary (English Version)

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Forest Department¹: Governance Challenges and Way Forward

(Extended Executive Summary²)

1. Study background and rationale

The forests are an important and integral part for maintaining equitable balance in the environment, including the conservation of biodiversity. The forests are also a vital natural and economic resource of Bangladesh. The contribution of the forests to the country's gross domestic product is about three per cent, and about 5.8 million people are directly and indirectly dependent on the forests for their lives and livelihoods. Considering the importance of forestland in maintaining the balance of the environment, the fifteenth Sustainable Development Goal emphasizes sustainable forest management³. Besides, as a signatory of 'The Convention on Biological Diversity' Bangladesh is committed to taking the necessary steps to conserve natural resources and forests. According to Article 18(a) of the Constitution of the People's Republic of Bangladesh, the forest conservation has been mentioned as a constitutional commitment of the Republic. The Constitution proclaims that "the state shall endeavour to protect and improve the environment and preserve and safeguard the natural resources, biodiversity, wetlands, forests, and wildlife for the present and future citizens". The National Forest Policy 2016, the Forest Master Plan 2017-2036, and the Seventh Five Year Plan 2016-2020 emphasize taking priority measures to protect forests, forestlands, and wildlife.

The Forest Department (FD) is overall responsible for protecting forests and biodiversity and implementing the forests related development activities in Bangladesh. The FD is also responsible for the conservation of forests, the environment and biodiversity, and the overall socio-economic development of the country. The FD has given priority to forest expansion, biodiversity conservation, poverty alleviation, and wildlife conservation by ensuring the direct participation of the forest-dependent communities in their various activities. The FD is also responsible for the conservation and management of forest and ecosystems of the biodiversity, forest expansion, reforestation of degraded forests, etc. At present, the total forest area under the control of the Forest Department is about 46 lacs 52 thousand 250 acres constituting about 12.76 per cent of the total areas of the country. Due to the unplanned implementation of various developmental works and construction of infrastructures on forestlands in Bangladesh, deforestation is going on. According to the Global Forest Watch, between 2001 and 2019, four lacs 32 thousand and 250 acres of tree coverage in Bangladesh have decreased, nine per cent of the total coverage area. Forest-centric irregularities and corruptions are mainly responsible for the alarming decline of forest areas.

The role and effectiveness of the FD as the chief controller and custodian of forests and forest resources is questionable. In various research reports and articles and in media reports, information on the deficit of efficiency of the FD and irregularities and corruption in afforestation, forest conservation activities have been published at different times. Despite having forest policy, master

¹ The word 'Department' is used against the Bengali word of 'Audhidaptar'. The Bengali name of the organization is 'Bon Audhidaptar', followed by the name as 'Forest Department' in official correspondence.

² This summary (translated in English) of the study report titled, "Forest Department: Governance Challenges and Way Forward" was released on December 30, 2020.

³ United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 15 (terrestrial life): Restoring and protecting terrestrial ecosystems and supporting sustainable use, sustainable forest management, tackling desertification, preventing land degradation and land reclamation and biodiversity reduction.

plan, and integrity strategy, the forest-centric corruption and irregularities have continued. Consequently, there is a need to monitor and analyze the capacity and effectiveness of the FD in exercising its entrusted power and fulfilling the assigned responsibilities from governance perspectives. An earlier study conducted by TIB in 2008 identified the forest management related to irregularities and corruption at the field level. The present study was undertaken as a continuation of that earlier research.

2. Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to identify the governance challenges in the activities of the Forest Department and make recommendations for overcoming these challenges. Besides, the specific objectives of the study are- (i) to identify the legal and institutional limitations and challenges of the Forest Department; (ii) to identify the types, levels and causes of irregularities and corruption in the various levels of activities of the FD; and (iii) to make recommendations for overcoming the governance challenges of the FD.

3. Study methodology

This is a qualitative study, but numerical data has been used in various cases as required. Necessary research-related data has been collected from both primary and secondary sources. However, most of the information, observations, and comments used in the research report are from primary sources. The information has been collected from a total of 60 offices considering the types of offices and scope of works at different FD levels. The offices include the office/headquarters of the Chief Conservator of Forests (CCF), the office of the Conservator of Forests (CF), the office of the Divisional Forest Officer (DFO), range office, beat office, outpost/camp, and check station. All four types of the forests in Bangladesh (tropical evergreen forest or hill forest; the tropical moist deciduous forest or ‘Sal forest’; natural mangrove forest or the Sundarbans; and the created mangrove forest in the coastal areas by the FD) have been included in the study.

3.1 Data collection methods

Research data has been collected and verified using qualitative data collection methods. A total of 130 key informant interviews (KII) have been conducted with a section of the senior officials of the concerned Ministry (i.e., The Ministry of Environment, Forest and Climate Change), various officials and employees of the FD (currently working and retired), researchers, experts, and media personnel. A total of six group discussions have been conducted among the local people and the beneficiaries of the forestry projects. Besides, the forest law, the website of the concerned organization, official documents, research reports and articles, reports and documents published in newspapers, and the website have been reviewed through the content analysis method. The field information has been collected and corroborated from January 2019 to November 2020.

3.2 The analytical framework of the study

The findings of the study have been analyzed based on six indicators of governance. Indicators and sub-indicators of governance are –

Table 1: Indicators and sub-indicators of governance

Indicator	Sub-indicator
Efficiency	Relevant laws and regulations, financial allocation, infrastructure, logistics, modern technology-based forest management, and human resource management
Transparency	The openness of information, proactive disclosure and dissemination of

	information
Accountability	Supervision, monitoring, audit, and grievance management
Participation	Involvement of local people and beneficiary communities in afforestation, forest conservation, and forest-related activities
Protection	Protection of the forest lands and recovery of the forcibly occupied lands
Corruption and irregularities	Areas, types and dimensions of corruption and irregularities

3.3 Reliability and validity of information

The information, observations and comments used in this report have been examined. Triangulation methods and multiple sources have been used cautiously to corroborate and check the consistency, authenticity and reliability of the information used in the report. Accordingly, the same information has been collected and checked from multiple sources and different levels of the FD. Besides, the information, observations and comments used in the report do not apply equally to all levels and tiers of the FD and other stakeholders.

4. The key findings of the study

4.1 The legal loopholes and challenges

4.1.1 The ‘Forest Act 1927’: The 93-year-old Forest Act (1927) does not include the definition of forest, type of forest, forest conservation process, use and allocation of forest land for development work, and the related guideline as well. Though there is a provision of revoking the status of a reserve forest in the law (Clause 27), the law lacks the prior permission of the Forest Department and the procedure to be revoked. This creates an opportunity to use the forest abruptly. Although there is a legal provision for establishing government control over the forest lands, the process of restoring the degraded and evicted forests are not clearly mentioned in the Act, there is also an absence of the rule. Although forest cases are handled sporadically, there is no comprehensive rules with specific guidelines for the effective implementation of the relevant laws. Despite the neighbouring countries having enacted supplementary laws to fill the forest law gaps (such as protection of treeless forestlands and rare species of trees), there is no such law in Bangladesh till today.

4.1.2 The ‘Wildlife (Conservation and Security) Act 2012’: The Act does not specify what would be done to restore and protect endangered wildlife. No provision has been made yet for formulating a specific action plan in this regard. The Forest Department does not have the authority to immediately detain anyone from the scene without the permission of the court, even when there is evidence of involvement in the forest crime. There is no provision regarding the person who will be responsible for investigating wildlife crime. The Act does not have a provision for punishment for unauthorized entry or stay in the sanctuary (Article 15) without permission. This Act repeals the power to detain a person without a warrant provided by the Wildlife Act of 1974.

4.1.3 The ‘Saw-Mill (License) Rules 2012’: As mentioned in Rule 7(a), there is an opportunity to set up and operate a saw-mill in a municipal area, this creates a risk of theft of trees from the reserved and protected forest by setting up a saw-mill. Besides, in case of punishment under Rule 12, the offender is liable to imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years and up to an additional Tk. 10,000 or both which are negligible as compared to the damage made to the forests and the environment.

4.2 Institutional capacity

4.2.1 Revenue collection and financial allocation: The Forest Department has an annual target of collecting about one billion taka (BDT) as revenue from the forest sector set by the National Board of Revenue. The research reveals that this revenue collection target is one of the major obstacles to forest protection, and it also creates risk of forest-centric corruption and irregularities. There are allegations that in the name of revenue collection some forest workers are involved in corruption, such as degrading natural forests for social forestry, rubber plantations, eco-tourism, leasing forestlands, timber sales, etc. To generate more revenue through the sale of timber, fast-growing but non-native species of trees are afforested. Despite being one of the most critical functions of FD, it lacks priority allocation. For example, the allocation per tree for horticulture/forestry is currently Tk. 17, but its need minimum Tk. 25-30. Furthermore, there is no separate budget for dealing with the forest-related legal actions; besides, there is no minimum allocation for the retainer fees. The allocations for a half-day, a full-day, and monthly fees are Tk. 125, Tk. 250, and Tk. 1,500, respectively, for conducting court proceedings, which are not consistent with the actual situation.

4.2.2 Infrastructure and logistics: There is a lack of infrastructure and logistics in the institutional capacity of the Forest Department. Due to lack of essential infrastructure (e.g., rooms, seating places for office work) and furniture in the field level offices, forest workers perform their duties in almost abandoned buildings/houses. There is a lack of own archives to preserve confiscated and recovered forest assets and forest case evidence. Consequently, the confiscated and recovered trees and timber are left in the open indefinitely, and there are examples of financial loss to the government. There are a lack of necessary logistics facilities, such as computers, printers, photocopiers, and broadband internet connections in the field offices. The field offices need to compose, print, and photocopy documents from outside due to lack of necessary logistics. This creates a risk of leakage of confidential information and official documents.

4.2.3 Modern technology-based forests management: Uses of the Geographical Information System (GIS) based technology such as surveillance drones, tracking devices, Global Positioning System (GPS), satellite images, internet of things, etc., have not been expanded introduced? to conduct afforestation, forest conservation, and management activities scientifically. As forestland documents, records and maps, case records, etc. are still preserved in the traditional way (paper-based), destruction, loss and theft occur, creating a risk/opportunity of encroachment on forestland. Also, the allocation of salaries and allowances to the employees of the range and below offices is not provided through online/mobile banking; consequently, there is an opportunity for the concerned official to keep the money illegally during cash distribution. Besides, due to the lack of modern technologies, forest patrolling, monitoring, and evaluation activities are conducted manually at the field level. As a result, forest-related crimes often do not come to the notice of the forest authorities immediately.

4.2.4 Human resource management: There is a lack of initiative for restructuring the overall human resources of FD, emphasizing on the use of modern technology (such as remote sensing) in forest conservation and management. As a result, there is a lack of initiative and accountability at the policy-making level, as well as the fear of losing jobs, especially among field workers, for the introduction of science-based forest management. Considering the conventional forest management system (i.e. manual forest patrolling), a proposal for a new organizational structure (17,820 nos.

human resources) has been submitted by the Forest Department to the concerned Ministry with an increase of about 42 per cent in the existing human resources (10,327 nos. work-force). If the proposed organizational and human resources structure is approved, there will be no qualitative change in forest conservation and management in Bangladesh. Besides, the risk of forest-centric corruption and waste of public funds would continue and increase. There is a high cost of human resource management in the traditional system, and there exist high risks and opportunities for forest-centric and institutional corruption. Suppose modern science and technology-based forest management (e.g., effective application of the remote sensing technology by the developed and neighbouring country like India) is introduced, in that case, there will be opportunities to reduce expenditure on human resource management and forest-centric institutionalized corruption.

4.3 Transparency

4.3.1 Openness, proactive disclosure, and dissemination of information: There are various deficiencies in the openness of information and proactive disclosure of information. Documents relating to the position and views of the Forest Department regarding the use of protected forestland for construction of various development projects and military installations, including large projects, are not made available on the website. Field survey-based updated information on the amount of forestland given to and forcibly occupied by various organizations is not available to the public. The website has no complete information on full budget and 32 development projects being implemented by the FD. It is not disclosed how much forestland is being forcibly occupied every year, where is it happening and who is doing it. Citizen Charter is not displayed in public at various field level offices like range, beat, check station, outpost, camp, etc. Although the Citizen Charter for the offices of the Chief Conservator of Forests, conservators, and divisional forest officers have been published on the website, the names of alternative information officers and communication means are not mentioned. The website also does not have detail information on project cost, implementation period, name, address and phone number of the concerned grievance-managing staff in the project area.

4.4 Accountability

4.4.1 Supervision and monitoring: Modern technology has not been introduced at field level offices in their supervision and monitoring in forestry and forest conservation activities. Besides, there is lack of institutional arrangements for supervising and monitoring all activities at field offices of the FD. As a result, only plantation/garden related activities are currently monitored for a specific period (as long as funds are available). There is no system to regularly inform the DFO about what is happening at the range and beat levels. Only if there is a complaint is taken into account by the concerned forest conservator and DFO. There are also allegations that project activities in remote and inaccessible areas are not monitored, those are instead evaluated on the spot in most cases. The real picture is not reflected in the corruption investigation report in most of the cases. It is observed that one-third of the afforestation works at the forest beat-levels has not been completed correctly, but the completion rate shows more than 80 per cent in paper. Moreover, it is rare for a part of the supervision and monitoring officers to recognize allegations of corruption.

4.4.2 Audit: The Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General of

Box 1

“The audit team members have lacked technical knowledge and skills to do audit a specialized body like the forest department. As a result, audits on forest activities have never been practised (‘Forestry Performance Audit’). Many trees have been planted in a financial year; range and beat office-based forcible occupancy of land and occupants, etc. are not mentioned in the audit report. It is impossible to get an accurate picture of the quality of afforestation and forest conservation activities by CAG’s audit just by reviewing the documents. In this case, ‘Forestry Performance Audit’ is vital”. (Source: Comment by a former senior official at Forest Department)

Bangladesh (hereinafter CAG) applies a typical audit mechanism and examines the documents of the central office and the divisional offices. The CAG office has some observations and objections in the financial year of 2018-2019. Revenue losses due to not reporting of the actual number of trees sold, outstanding money, non-imposition and deduction of value-added tax, waste of money, etc. have been raised. However, there are rare instances of departmental punishment subject to proper investigation. Besides, according to the Government Employees (Conduct) Rules, 1979, the details of annual income and assets of Forest Department staff and their family members are not submitted or disclosed to the concerned authorities at the end of the year.

4.4.3 Grievance redress management: There are various deficiencies in the grievance redress mechanism of the FD, such as receiving/lodging complaints about the FD and its activities from forest workers and partners through online and over the phone (land phone), and other conventional modes (written and direct complaints). Although there is a system, in most cases, it is not functional. The Department also lacks the initiative to inform the general people about the conventional method of reporting. Complaining against a fellow employee of the FD increases the risk of harassment in some instances. There are examples of facing departmental harassments by the complainants. In this case, the complainers are called in the office of the concerned senior officer, withholding increment, and transfer to remote areas before the expiry of the term. No complaints have been lodged with forest conservators and divisional forest officials between May and October 2020; at that time, out of 153 pending complaints, only eight complaints have been redressed. Moreover, the central and field level offices of the FD are not organizing public hearings.

4.5 Participation of the forest-dependent indigenous people and local community

4.5.1 Inclusion of forest-dependent indigenous and local people: There is a deficit in the participation and inclusion of forest-dependent indigenous peoples in the field level activities of the Forest Department. In this case, by depriving the local forest-dependent people as the beneficiaries of the social forestry project, to include the influential local people as the beneficiaries in connivance with a section of forest staff; the real beneficiaries as ‘community forest workers’, especially those who traditionally live in forest lands and cultivate crops, are not given a chance. It is also alleged that some of the forest workers have chosen themselves as the beneficiaries of social forestry. Moreover, there are instances of deprivation of land rights in certain cases. The declaration of reserved and protected forests, national parks, eco-parks and wildlife sanctuaries, etc. without the opinion, advice, or consent of the local forest-dependent people, deprive them of their traditional rights on forestlands. There is an allegation of filing thousands of fake cases against the forest-dependent people by the FD.

Box 2

Recently (September 14, 2020) Tangail Forest Department forcibly evicted a tribal family from Arankhola Mauza in Madhupur Upazila from cultivated land (40 decimal). The banana grower was not informed before the eviction drive. However, there is no similar instance in the recovery of land seized by influential people in the same Mauza as some of the forest workers have links with local politicians and influential people.

There are examples of abuse and misappropriation of power by a section of forest staff. Observations have shown that indigenous peoples are forcibly evicted from lands traditionally inhabited by them, and in some instances, harassment cases are filed. The local people were evicted from their lands due to the allocation of government forestland to implement development activities, construction of cantonments, and military infrastructures without providing alternative employment and housing.

4.6 Protection of forests land

Although the foremost responsibility of the FD is to protect the forestland of the country, there are clear examples of its obvious failures and deviations in carrying that out. According to the study findings, despite the Department of Environment's (DoE) had clear objections to establishing the Rampal coal-based power project, the FD finally gave a green signal for the implementation of the project. Although the environmental impact assessment report of the project was flawed and it was risky for the Sundarbans according to the observation of the UNESCO observation and the Ramsar Convention, the FD has failed to take a firm stand against the project. Moreover, the consent of FD for the construction of the Dohazari-Gundum railway project through wildlife sanctuaries and national parks (Dulahajra and Medhakchupia) has been considered a clear violation of the powers and responsibilities vested upon it.

In most cases, the FD has been accused of failing to exercise its legal and institutional powers (such as conducting campaigns to stop illegal activities on forestland, filing lawsuits, etc.) and restricting itself to making written objections. According to the research data, the electricity, gas, and water supply has been provided by the concerned departments for the illegal establishments established on forestlands in different parts of the country including Cox's Bazar district. The project land has been filled up by dumping project waste and soil in the coastal swamp forests, rivers, and seas adjacent to the coal power project located at Maheshkhali and Matarbari. Besides, crude oil depots and pipelines have been set up in Maheshkhali by clearing 192 acres of protected forestland. During the construction of the Cox's Bazar-Teknaf marine drive road, FD could not stop cutting down more than two thousand trees (locally known as 'jarjon') and use of the soil of nearby hills and forestlands by the contractor of the road project. The FD also has failed to stop anti-forest activities like the construction of roads through the Sangu and Matamuhuri protected forests; gas transmission pipeline through Sal forest; Ramgarh-Sitakundu power transmission lines through protected forests, etc. which are obvious examples of pro-deforestation actions.

In most cases, there are allegations that the Forest Department is limited to making written objections. As a result, about one lakh 60 thousand 240 acres of forestland have been allotted to various organizations. Air Force firing range has been set up in more than three hundred acres inside the Sal forest of Madhubur Upazila. The establishment of cantonments in Ramu and Ruma Upazilas has endangered wild elephant sanctuaries. Besides, the destruction of forests and biodiversity has been accelerated by establishing reserved forests in Sitakundu and Mirsarai Upazilas and a special export processing zone (EPZ) on Sonadia Island.

4.7 The restoration of illegally occupied forestland

Although a total of 2 lacs 87 thousand 453 acres of forestland has been forcibly occupied till December 2019, the Department has been able to recover only 8 thousand 792 acres during the last five years. There are internal and external reasons for the Forest Department for reclaiming forestland in low quantity. For example, the land deeds and documents were not in the final stage with the Department, and there was a lack of initiative too. According to the study, no action has been taken in Gazipur, Tangail, Mymensingh, Cox's Bazar, and other districts to reclaim the forest lands and evict the illegal establishments. In some cases, subordinates are pressured by their superiors not to take action against influential people. There are instances where the concerned forest offices at the field level are not undertaking eviction operations and are limited to making only written objections and exchanging letters with the occupying agencies. Moreover, through the unauthorized monetary transactions, a section of the forest staff gives people the opportunity to cultivate cash crops in the forestland. In some cases, land reclamation and evictions of illegal establishments were prevented and

obstructed by a section of lawmakers, representatives, influential people, district administrations, and law enforcement agencies.

4.8 Areas, types, and levels of corruption and irregularities

4.8.1 Abuse of power by forest employees: In various cases, there is a misuse of power and lack of equitable use of power by a section of the forest employees. According to the research findings, the forest employees are transferred and posted in their home districts bypassing the transfer policy. Even after the transfer order is issued, it has been suspended and kept indefinitely in the same office. There are such examples in Gazipur, Tangail, Chittagong and Cox's Bazar, and three hill districts. Gazipur and Tangail districts have seen an increase in the practice of these in the protected forests. Moreover, the concerned forest workers illegally collect up to Tk 5,000 per acre annually, by allowing the people to cultivate cash crops in the reserved forestlands of Madhupur and Kaliakair Upazilas. Besides, the subordinate staffs are instructed not to obstruct, detain and seize the transportation of illegal forest assets. There are allegations of harassment, including transfer, if anyone disobeys.

4.8.2 Nexus: There are allegations of direct and indirect involvement of some forest workers with corruption and irregularities. There are instances of forged documents and records made up in the name of various individuals and organizations in collusion with a section of staff of local land, settlement, and sub-register offices, and some forest workers. Natural forests (Sal and Gazari) are permanently degraded and occupied to create social forestry. Installation of saw-mills has continued in defiance of the prohibition of such installation within 10 km from the boundaries of government forests (Section 7A, Saw-mill License Rules 2012). Although there are more than 50 illegal saw-mills in the protected forests under Sakhipur and Ghatail Upazilas, there is a lack of effective measures to against them. Some forest workers have been accused of secretly releasing smugglers or not taking legal action against them even after seizing illegal forest resources (such as tigers, crocodiles, deer meat, timber, etc.).

4.8.3 Unauthorized monetary transactions: According to the findings of the study, there exist irregularities in various appointments, promotions, and transfers/postings of the FD. Negotiations are made and influences are exerted at a higher level for posting to 'financially lucrative' places, especially considering the position, area of work, opportunity to sell forest resources illegally and high value of the land.

Table 2: Illegal Transaction for recruitment, promotion, and transfer/posting

Name of the Position	Field of Transactions	Amount of Money	Recipient of Money
Chief Conservator of Forests	Appointment by the promotion	1 - 3 Crore	A section of the policymakers and the Personal Assistant (PA) to the Minister and part of the high-level relevant officials and employees at the Ministry
Conservator of Forests	Recruitment and transfer	20 - 25 Lacs	
Divisional Forests Officer	Promotion/ transfer	10 Lacs - 1 Crore	
Project Director	Appointment/ posting	1 - 1.5 Crore	
Assistant Conservator of Forests	Transfer	1 - 5 Lacs	
Range Officer	Transfer	5 - 10 Lacs	A section of the CCF Office, Regional and Divisional Forest
Check station-in-charge	Transfer	10 - 25 Lacs	
Forester	Transfer	10 - 25 Lacs	

Beat Officer	Transfer	2 - 5 Lacs	Offices, etc.
Forest Guard	Transfer	0.5 - 2.5 Lacs	

* The information provided above is not equally applicable to all positions, staff, and all times

In various social afforestation programmes, some forest staffs are engaged in illegal activities, e.g., extraction of illegal money. Analysis of the research data shows that in the case of enrolment and receipt of social forestry plots under the scheme as beneficiaries of social forestry, the concerned foresters collect three to five thousand taka and without showing the local landless in the documents, in reality, the influential people got allotted the plots by bribing Tk. 50 to 60 thousand to forest officials. Analysis of the research data shows that, in the beneficiary selection process of social forestry (enrolment in social forestry plots under the project), three to five thousand taka is levied illegally by the concerned forest staff. Besides, instead of enrolling the local landless people in the documents, in reality, the influential people got allotted the plots by bribing Tk. 50 to 60 thousand to forest officials

4.8.4 Embezzlements: There are allegations of embezzlement against the forest officials responsible for the implementation of the project by taking the entire bill through the contractor even after partial completion of the project. There are also allegations that some of the policymakers are involved in embezzling funds from the forest project. According to the findings, an example of an official being forced to pay the full bill to the contractor for an unfinished project in the direction of a former minister and later the official bound to resigned under the minister's pressure. Besides, during the salary distribution in cash of the staffs of 'Financially Lucrative Areas' beat, check station, outpost, and camp level by the concerned range officer, by the name of 'monthly expenses' of Range and DFO's are deducted up to Tk. 15,000 per office. In some cases, there are allegations that the accounts branch of DFO deducted Tk.200-500 per travel bill raised by forest workers in the field, and up to 50 per cent of the cash raised for motor vehicle repairs and refuelling is deducted.

9. The overall observations

The effective implementation of the Forest Act (1927) is hindered/challenged due to absence of necessary rules and action plans, and lack of initiatives to reform the 93-year-old Forest Act to make it updated and in line with contemporary realities. There have been recent examples of the department's discriminatory exercise of power in the name of the forcible eviction of forest-dependent indigenous peoples in violation of traditional land rights, forest law violations, and unilaterally protected forests, wildlife sanctuaries, national park declarations. The FD has failed to show its commitment by taking adequate measures against the implementation of environment-degrading mega projects including coal-fired power projects around the reserve and protected forestlands, illegal occupation of forest lands, allocation of forest lands for various development works and inactive role of the FD in preventing the permanent loss of forests, etc. in recent times.

The Department also lacks effective afforestation measures for the appropriate species, modern technology for forest conservation and management, and an emphasis on expansion of forest-centric revenue and income-generating activities. There is also a lack of priority on budgetary allocations for enhancing the infrastructure and logistics of the forest offices, particularly at the field-level. Besides, there is a lack of effective measures to curb the spread of corruption in the FD, including its revenue collection, forest conservation and afforestation related activities, etc. The research also indicates that the forest sector-centric corruption is institutionalized due to the absence lack of effective supervision, institutional monitoring, and a forest performance audit of forest-centric activities at all levels of FD.

5. The recommendations

TIB is proposing the following recommendations to transform the FD into a competent and effective institution with priority given to modern technology-based forest conservation and management-

1. Various institutions using forestlands must obtain formal permission from the FD before using, allocating and de-reserving forest land, and complete flawless environmental impact assessment and formulate rules for environmentally-friendly compensatory afforestation.
2. The forest law needs to be radically reformed. The responsibilities of the FD should be duly determined for the purpose of participatory forest management, including ensuring the traditional land rights of forest-dependent indigenous people and the local community.
3. Collection of revenue and profit from the forest should be stopped immediately. Commercialization of natural forests should also be stopped completely.
4. The profits should be given to the beneficiaries without cutting trees off the matured social forests, and necessary arrangements should be made to conserve those forests.
5. Environment and eco-friendly forests need to be created in the degraded natural forests and treeless lands, such as new chars and besides the roads and highways.
6. Expansion of modern technology and its effective use in the forest management (including preservation of forest records) should be done. The overall administrative and manpower structure of the FD should be fully streamlined by giving priority to the technology-based forest conservation management.
7. Introduce compulsory and rotational transfer of forest workers at circles and divisions, and ensure its proper implementation through effective and accountable mechanisms.
8. Necessary financial allocation, adequate infrastructure and logistics facilities for all offices should be ensured subject to an appropriate need assessment.
9. The arrangements should be made for online/mobile banking for all types of financial transactions including office management expenses and project funds, and transactions at the field level; arrangements have to be made to send the salaries and allowances of beat and subordinate workers directly to the bank account of the concerned forest worker.
10. The boundaries of government forests need to be demarcated based on the Cadastral Survey (CS) records. The FD should show a strong commitment to recovering the evicted lands, including computerization of forest records and documents in a digital manner. The amount of forest degraded and encroached land, and forest land under the high risk of endangered deforestation/encroachment should be appropriately identified and measured, and the failures of the FD with regard to recovery so far should also be explored here too.
11. All activities of field offices should also be brought under modern technology-based supervision and monitoring. Accordingly, all activities of the field offices should be informed regularly to the concerned DFOs and Conservators.
12. An audit system of forest-centric activities of the Forest Department (e.g., 'Forestry Performance Audit') should be introduced and effectively followed on a regular basis.
13. The website needs to be more informative (e.g. audit report, full information on budget, development projects, forest land allotted and forcibly encroached, etc.) and updated regularly.
14. Annual statement of income and asset of FD staff involved in project implementation, forest protection, and forest resource conservation and their family members must be submitted to the higher authority at the end of each year and disclosed publicly?

15. Immediate exemplary punishment should be ensured against those involved in irregularities, corruption, and breach of the discipline of the Forest Department.
