
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Economic Potential and Existing Reality of the Chittagong Hill Tracts

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| ABSTRACT

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is a crucial geographical area in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh. Its area is about 13,300 square kilometres, which is one-tenth of the total area of Bangladesh. The region's diverse topography, cultural diversity, and natural resources make it richer than other regions. Most of the minority communities of Bangladesh live in this area. Being home to various small communities, lush green hills, and rich in natural resources, this region is the centre of people's emotions, love, and interest. The main objective of this research paper is to analyse the economic potential of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the existing barriers to trade and commerce. This research paper is based on a qualitative method. Instead of collecting primary data for analysis, various reliable secondary data have been relied upon. Sectors such as tourism, agriculture, and small and cottage industries have massive potential for economic growth in the region. Essential agricultural products, including rubber, cashew nuts, coffee, bamboo, and bananas, as well as sectors like eco-tourism and community tourism, can make significant contributions to the national economy. However, there are many obstacles to achieving these goals. Prominent among them are land ownership disputes, conflict and extortion, unsafe environment, poor communication system, and lack of access to adequate financial support due to administrative complexities. Apart from this, institutional inequality and the lack of participation of local people in development activities are also significant challenges. The paper makes specific recommendations, including taking practical steps to resolve land disputes, improve connectivity, promote agro-industry, and formulate an integrated and inclusive economic development strategy. If these recommendations are implemented, the Chittagong Hill Tracts will emerge as an intense centre of economic growth in the country.

| KEYWORDS

Chittagong Hill Tracts, Economy, Trade, Security, Agriculture, Tourism, Infrastructure, Eco-Tourism.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

The Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT) comprise the three hill districts of Khagrachari, Rangamati, and Bandarban in the south-eastern part of Bangladesh. Consisting of three distinct districts, the region is geographically distinct and diverse from the plains of Bangladesh. There are dense forests, high and low mountains, deep valleys, and rivers that have endowed it with a unique natural beauty. The region is mainly inhabited by about 13 small ethnic groups, including Chakma, Marma, and Tripura, whose distinct cultures and ways of life have given the region a multi-dimensional identity. The Chittagong Hill Tracts have been a special district since the British period. Later in 1983 'Parbatya Chattogram' district was divided into three separate districts (Khagrachhari, Rangamati, and Bandarban). The Chittagong Hill Tracts have considerable potential to contribute to the national economy. The region is rich in natural resources and has immense potential to prosper economically due to its environment and diverse culture. Sectors such as agriculture, tourism, small and cottage industries, in particular, can open a new horizon of growth.

However, despite this immense potential, the region has been economically backward for a long time. The main reason for this is some serious problems arising from the political and historical context.

The central theme of this report is to expose the business picture of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, highlighting both its immense potential and the complex challenges hindering its implementation, while also proposing solutions to these problems. It analyses how the impassable transportation system, long-standing land disputes, and security problems are hampering economic activities. With proper management, it is possible to add additional value to the country's economy up to about Tk 8,000 crore a year if the fallow lands are brought under planned cultivation. However, this possibility is often hindered by complex problems. Political instability, factional feuds, and extortion have made the business environment very risky. The deep problems in land management caused by this historical political conflict act as a significant obstacle for local and foreign investors. The report aims to provide a comprehensive overview of the economic structure of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, while also examining the severity of the ongoing issues and exploring potential sustainable solutions.

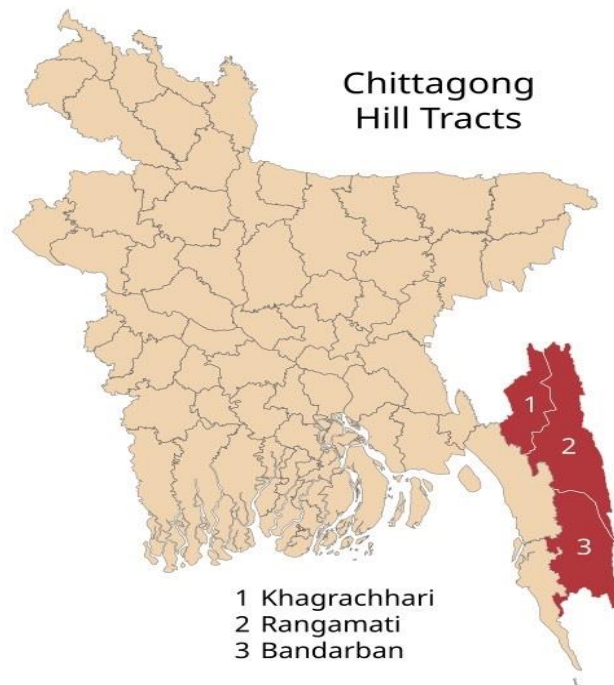


Figure 1: Chittagong Hill Tracts

2. Research method

This research paper is based on a qualitative method. Instead of collecting primary data for analysis, various reliable secondary data have been relied upon. This approach has helped to get a holistic and multi-faceted picture of the economic situation, prospects, and challenges of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Reports on economic, social, and political issues from the country's major media outlets, such as Dainik Bangla, Prothom Alo, Jugantor, and other local newspapers, have been analysed. Necessary information has been collected from the reports and policy-related documents published by government institutions like the Ministry of Chittagong Hill Tracts Affairs and Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board. The structure of the data and analysis has been taken from various academic research papers on the history, society, and economy of the mountainous region. The development activities and challenges have been taken from the reports of the United Nations, UNICEF, the International Food and Agriculture Organisation, and the Chittagong Hill Tracts. In the preparation of this report, not only were the details of the incident and statistics presented, but the interrelationships between the data were also analysed in depth. For example, the relationship between land disputes and financial investment has been analysed by combining data from multiple sources.

2.1 Purpose of the study

The main objective of this research paper is to provide a comprehensive overview of the business and economy of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. To achieve the main objective, specific goals have been set, guiding the research process in a particular direction.

2.1.1 The main objective:

To provide a detailed and unbiased analysis of the economic prospects of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and the problems existing in the field of trade and commerce.

2.1.2 Specific objectives:

1. Identification of potential sectors: To identify potential sectors such as agriculture, tourism, small and cottage industries in the mountainous Chittagong. Present the current status of these sectors and their future contribution to the national economy.
2. Impediment Analysis: An in-depth examination of the significant obstacles hindering business operations in Parbatya Chattagram, including inadequate infrastructure, land disputes, security concerns, financial instability, and institutional shortcomings, and their impact on economic development.
3. Formulating policy-based recommendations: To formulate realistic, practical, and policy-based recommendations to address the identified problems and materialise the immense possibilities. These recommendations can be helpful to governments, policymakers, entrepreneurs, and local communities.

By achieving these objectives, the report will create a well-structured framework for the economic development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and will play an essential role in policy formulation.

3. Findings and Discussion

3.1 Description of potential economic sectors:

Being very close to the country's largest seaport and commercial capital, the Chattogram Hill Tracts region can be considered a potential sector for economic growth both geographically and climatically. In particular, agriculture, tourism, and small industries can be the mainstay of the region's economy. Agriculture is the primary source of livelihood for the local people. In the last few decades, the dependence on traditional methods of jhum cultivation has been reduced to a great extent, and the use of modern commercial agricultural technology has become important. As a result of these changes, some specialised agricultural products have added new dimensions to the region's economy. The important agricultural and economic crops of the region are mango, banana, jackfruit, papaya, pineapple, ginger, turmeric, orange, litchi, cashew nut, jambura, lemon, malta, sugarcane, and bamboo. Below are some of the key areas:

3.1.1 Rubber

Rubber is one of the most successful industries in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Starting from the 1980s, rubber cultivation was started by bringing the hills under cultivation. At present, rubber is cultivated on several hundred thousand acres of land, and about six thousand metric tons of rubber are produced every year. A large part of the country's domestic demand is met from rubber produced here. As a result, a lot of foreign exchange is being saved by reducing rubber imports. There is a possibility of earning foreign exchange by exporting rubber abroad in the future, by increasing commercial farming. Rubber is called "white gold" in the mountains.

3.1.2 Cashew and coffee

The soil and climate of the Chittagong Hill Tracts are very suitable for the cultivation of cashew and coffee. Local government and private institutions are providing loans, training, and quality seedlings to encourage farmers to grow this high-value crop. Under the government's program, research is underway to assess the feasibility of coffee and cashew nut cultivation in 16 upazilas of three hill districts. According to the research, if coffee can be grown on only 1 lakh hectares of land out of the non-irrigated five lakh hectares of land in this area, it is possible to produce 2 lakh tons of coffee annually, which has a market value of about Tk 8,000 crore. This will enable the saving of foreign

exchange and facilitate exports to meet the country's demand. The economic potential of the agricultural products produced in this area is raw, mainly material-dependent, which cannot be fully exploited in the absence of processing. For example, farmers sell cashew nuts at tk. 100 per kg. However, after processing these raw nuts in the factory, the market price ranges from tk. 1,500 to tk. 1,600 per kg. This huge price difference shows how the absence of processing industries at the local level has limited the economic growth of the region. Entrepreneurs and businessmen believe that establishing banana chip or juice factories in the hilly areas can provide a stronger foundation for the region's economy.

3.1.3 Banana

The red and acidic soil of the hills is very suitable for banana cultivation. Because the banana produced here is very nutritious and chemical-free, its demand is increasing day by day throughout the country. In the financial year 2022-23, bananas were cultivated on approximately 36,000 hectares of land in three hill districts, resulting in a production of about 5.49 lakh metric tons, with a market value of about Tk 17.50 crore. This huge trade has established agriculture as one of the main drivers of the region's economy. Since bananas are a twelve-month fruit, farmers can earn income from this sector throughout the year.

3.1.4 The tourism industry.

The natural beauty of the Chittagong Hill Tracts, including its mountain rivers, fountains, and diverse culture among the small ethnic groups, holds great potential for the tourism industry. The tourism industry is a fast-growing sector in the modern world and can make a significant contribution to the GDP of Bangladesh. The economy of Chittagong Hill Tracts can be improved through eco-tourism, adventure tourism, and multicultural development. Eco-tourism is a model that emphasises the strengthening of the economy through the preservation of the environment and the welfare of the local population. In remote places like Keokrodang, Thanchi, and Roangchhari, local villagers are using tourism as a source of income by accommodating tourists in their homes. Tourism is not only a means of entertainment but also a means of livelihood for the local people.

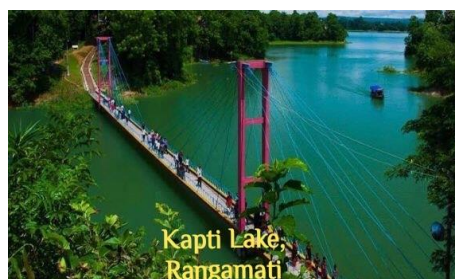


Figure 2: Tourism Attraction places

3.1.5 Small and cottage industries

Small ethnic groups have a rich heritage of various handicrafts associated with their own culture and way of life. For example, various items made of bamboo and cane include baskets, mats, and self-worn clothes, as well as weaving. Women micro-entrepreneurs are processing jams, jellies, pickles, and dry fruits and selling them on various online platforms, apart from the local market, which is helping them to achieve financial ease. Although the Bangladesh Small and Cottage Industries Corporation (BSCIC) has taken various programs to develop this industry, many initiatives have failed due to a lack of patronage.

3.1.6 Forest Resources

Historically, the Chittagong Hill Tracts are well known throughout the country for their forest wealth. However, at present, illegal timber smuggling, uncontrolled tree felling, and population pressure have pushed the forest wealth of the region towards destruction. As a result, the natural environment of the mountains is losing its balance, and wildlife is going towards extinction. To prevent this ecological imbalance, the government is now encouraging eco-friendly bamboo cultivation by discouraging jhum cultivation, mahogany, and their seedlings.

3.1.7 Turmeric

Turmeric is one of the various agricultural products produced in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Turmeric is cultivated on a commercial basis in hilly slopes and some plain lands. Turmeric is making an essential contribution to the economy of the region by supplying turmeric to different parts of the country to meet the needs of the local population. The soil and climate of this region are very fertile for the cultivation of turmeric. This fertile, hilly soil and sufficient rainfall create a favourable environment for turmeric cultivation. Due to the slope of the mountain land, water does not accumulate here, which is essential for turmeric cultivation. Soil type and the experience of local farmers help in producing quality turmeric in the region. Generally, turmeric seeds are sown from April to May and harvested from December to January. Many families in the hilly areas depend on turmeric farming for their livelihood. Apart from the local market, turmeric is also exported to major cities in the country. It is a significant source of income for farmers, helping them to improve their living standards. From turmeric cultivation to processing, packaging, and marketing, a lot of workers are needed at different stages. Both local men and women are engaged in this work. Turmeric is a spice with many medicinal properties. Turmeric is an excellent antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and antiseptic. Turmeric is widely used as a spice in the food industry, as well as in Ayurvedic and herbal medicine. If practical steps are taken, the turmeric produced here will meet the country's demand and create export potential. The high-quality turmeric of this area can fetch a reasonable price in the international market, which will help in earning foreign exchange.

3.1.8 Jackfruit

The hills and fertile soil of Chittagong Hill Tracts, including Khagrachhari, Rangamati, and Bandarban, are very suitable for various crops and fruits. Jackfruit is one of the major crops of the region, which plays an essential role in the economy of the region. Although jackfruit is the national fruit of Bangladesh, the commercial market of the national fruit in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is still not fully developed. The quality, meaning, and taste of jackfruit in this region are incomparable to those in other parts of the country. Mountain jackfruit grows in size, and the cells are juicy and extremely sweet. The demand for mountain jackfruit is comparatively higher in the market. Jackfruit is also found in the mountains, especially when the fruit season in other parts of the country is over. This is due to the peculiarities of the soil and climate. Due to its exceptional quality, the delicious fruit jackfruit of the Chittagong Hill Tracts can be established as a brand. Due to a lack of storage and proper processing, jackfruit worth millions of taka is wasted every year. A variety of products can be made from jackfruit to ensure its proper use. A delicious vegetable can be prepared from the seeds of raw jackfruit. In this process, various products made of jackfruit can be sold in the market throughout the year. Apart from this, chips, jam, jelly, juice, and even ice cream can be made from ripe jackfruit. Beans are a good source of protein. A variety of dishes can be made from the seeds. The commercial production and marketing of these products can create new income opportunities for the farmers of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. With proper planning, government sponsorship, and private investment, it will be possible to establish jackfruit as a successful agricultural product not only in the country but also in the international market. As a result, the quality of life of local farmers will improve and the economy of Chittagong Hill Tracts will be more prosperous.

3.1.9 Bamboo

In the three hill districts of Rangamati, Khagrachhari, and Bandarban, bamboo is not only a forest resource but also an integral part of the life and culture of the people of the region. The bamboo-based industry is a significant source of livelihood and employment for the poor and backward communities of the region. The tendency to harvest bamboo shoots as food, in particular, is a significant threat to its long-term sustainability. This is an example of long-term loss of a collective asset for a short-term economic gain. Secondly, although the government has undertaken various projects for the development of the bamboo industry, there is no significant progress in the development, monitoring, and implementation of these projects at the field level. This raises questions about the effectiveness of the projects. Thirdly, the development of the environment is closely linked to the development of the bamboo industry in the hilly Chattogram. Bamboo plays a crucial role in preventing erosion of high mountain land. No sustainable economic development is possible without environmental protection. A project was undertaken by the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board (CHTTDB) to increase bamboo cultivation at a cost of

around Tk 23-25 crore. The project aimed to create 13,000 new bamboo plantations in the three hill districts and to train 13,260 farmers in advanced bamboo production. The objective of this initiative was to increase the income of the hill people and create employment. In addition, the local Small and Cottage Industries Department (BSCIC) provides training and loan facilities to enhance the skills of bamboo and cane artisans.

3.2 Impediments

Although there is a massive potential for the Chittagong Hill Tracts economy to stand on solid ground, there are complex obstacles in the way of its implementation. These challenges are deeply related to each other, and if one problem is not solved, other problems appear.

3.2.1 Regional conflicts

In 1972, a small group of pro-Chinese communist leaders in the Chittagong Hill Tracts joined the mass movement, demanding autonomy for the region. The conflict lasted for nearly 24 years before a peace treaty was signed on 2 December 1997. Until the signing of the peace agreement, about 30,000 people were killed in clashes between the army and the peacekeepers. After prolonged clashes and killings, the Awami League regime finally signed the 'Hill Tracts Agreement' with the Bangladesh government on 2 December 1997, known as the Peace Accord. Following the signing of the peace agreement and the Jana Sanghati Samiti's surrender of its weapons, a faction refused to lay down arms and separated from the organisation. This faction later formed the UPDF and continued its armed activities. As a result, JSS (original), JSS (reform), UPDF (original), UPDF (democratic), KNF, and several other regional organisations have conflicted with each other. This situation continues to this day. Even after the peace agreement, the armed activities of the rebels in the Chittagong Hill Tracts continue. Since the signing of the peace agreement, 16 members of the security forces (8 army, 2 BGB, 2 police, 2 Ansar VDP), 441 tribals, and 271 Bengalis have been killed in various attacks by the insurgents till 2018. Six hundred seventy-two tribals and 828 Bengalis were injured. Nine hundred ninety-one tribals and 420 Bengalis have been abducted. More than 13,000 tribal rebels are still active in the mountains, including 3,000 armed and 10,000 semi-armed.

3.2.2 Insecurity and Extortion

The biggest obstacles to trade and commerce in the Chittagong Hill Tracts are a lack of security and extortion by armed groups. Extortion has created a risky environment for investment and economic activities in the region. In the three hilly districts, 5-7 armed organisations collect money from people in business and ordinary people, focusing on domination, with extortion as the primary basis. According to intelligence, around Tk 500-Tk 700 crore is withdrawn from the region every year. People from all strata of society are being exploited. Business people with limited income, day labourers, retail agricultural products sellers, and large companies also have to pay a fixed rate. Various mobile phone operators in the Chittagong Hill Tracts have to pay hefty annual charges regularly. Mobile towers are attacked and often disconnected if the money is not given as per the demand. Sometimes there are cases of kidnapping of workers who come to work in the tower. At the time of writing this article, one tower technician of Robi Mobile Operator has been missing for about a month. All traders, including hotels, restaurants, and tourism traders, have to do business by paying a fixed rate. All kinds of development projects at the government and private levels are involved in extortion. Contractors engaged in development work always have to pay separately to more than one regional party. If they do not pay, the work is stopped and the workers are kidnapped. This extortion and insecurity are significant obstacles in the path of economic development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Violence is often centred on the dominance of armed groups. New entrepreneurs and investors are discouraged from entering the region due to such violence, kidnappings, and criminal tendencies. As a result, economic growth is hampered, and local people face serious challenges in maintaining their everyday lives and livelihoods. This is not just an isolated security issue, but it is a significant financial crisis that is hampering legitimate economic activities.

3.2.3 Poverty

The people of the three hill districts are still far behind in terms of living standards compared to the plains. At the national level, the poverty rate is 24.3%. 13%. Bandarban has the highest poverty rate in the country. The poverty rate in the district is 63.2%, 52.7% in Khagrachari, and 28.5% in Rangamati. The poverty rate in Chittagong Hill

Tracts is much higher than in other parts of the country. While the national poverty rate is around 22%, up to 48.13% of the total population of the Chittagong Hill Tracts lives below the poverty line. Poverty rates are even higher among smaller ethnic groups. 65% of them live in the hilly areas, and 80% of the people living in the plains are still below the poverty line. These statistics indicate that economic inequality is a significant problem in the region. There is also a difference in per capita income between small ethnic groups and Bengalis in the Chittagong Hill Tracts.

3.2.4 The weakness of the infrastructure

The biggest impediment to trade and commerce in the Chittagong Hill Tracts is poor infrastructure and limited communication. Due to its rugged topography, characterised by forested and mountainous terrain, road connectivity is inferior and underdeveloped. As a result, farmers are unable to transport their produce to the market. As a result, they often lose their crops or are forced to sell at low prices, which hurts them economically. Projects such as the recent border road construction are expected to play a considerable role in economic development because they will improve connectivity and create new business ventures and investment opportunities. Infrastructural constraints are also a significant weakness in the tourism sector.

3.2.5 Land and security issues

Disputes over land ownership are the most profound and long-standing problem in the Chittagong Hill Tracts. Land disputes often give rise to conflicts between the Pahari people, who do not have traditional land rights documents, and the Bengali settlers who came from the plains. A commission has been set up to resolve land disputes, but its effectiveness is limited. This land-related complexity directly hinders economic activity.

Along with land, the security situation is also unfavourable for investment. Extortion and violence by various armed groups have put businesses at risk. Farmers also have to pay taxes to armed groups when selling their produce, such as agricultural products, wood, and fruits. This insecure environment discourages local and foreign investors and limits the potential for economic growth.

3.2.6 Financial and institutional challenges

One of the major problems affecting the business and trade of the Chittagong Hill Tracts is the crisis in receiving financial assistance. The lending activities of 'Bazaar Fund' have been halted for an extended period, affecting approximately 40,000 traders across the three districts. The main reason for the closure of this loan program is bureaucratic complications. In 2019, the then deputy commissioner of Khagrachhari questioned the market fund's attachment of the land through a letter, resulting in the stoppage of this loan activity. As a result of this incident, an investment of about Rs 20 crore is stuck in Bandarban. This situation shows how land-related legal complexities and administrative ambiguities can directly cripple businesses.

Lack of institutional support is also evident in small and cottage industries. This industry is not able to develop due to the lack of effective government initiatives and investors. In Rangamati, the BSCIC Industrial City project, initiated 18 years ago, remains incomplete, serving as a stark example of the government's lack of patronage.

3.2.7 Social and Political Challenges

There are also complaints of discrimination in development activities. There have also been allegations of racial discrimination in important organisations such as the Chittagong Hill Tracts Development Board. In the advisory committee of the board, where more than 50% of the Bengali population of the region lives, no representative of the Bengali community was kept. Similarly, there are allegations that the activities of local and foreign NGOs are mainly limited to tribals. Such discriminatory measures are not only a question of social justice but also erode the confidence of the local people in the development process, rendering any development project ineffective.

3.3 Recommendations

An integrated, multi-dimensional, and participatory strategy must be adopted to realise the immense potential of the Chittagong Hill Tracts and to solve the existing problems. Below are some specific recommendations:

1. Land Dispute Resolution: A permanent and effective solution to the land dispute is very important for the development of the Chittagong Hill Tracts. The Hill Land Commission should be strengthened both administratively and legally. Traditional land rights should be recognised within the legal framework, and the complexities surrounding hill land ownership should be addressed through a transparent land survey.

2. Avoiding regional conflicts and violence: It is crucial to stop the armed activities of the separatist organisations in the three hill districts and bring them back to everyday life, and strengthen the activities of the security forces by bringing the security forces to the local population. To take concerted efforts to maintain the peaceful co-existence of all communities by preventing murder, extortion, kidnapping, and other seditious activities of 6 armed organisations formed at different times.

3. Financial Incentives: Various financial incentives should be taken to create jobs and reduce unemployment. The lending activities of the languishing 'market funds' should start soon. The concerned authorities, banks, and financial institutions should resolve the bureaucratic complexities by giving concrete legal guidelines on land foreclosure. At the same time, opportunities should be created for small and medium entrepreneurs to get loans from banks and financial institutions on easy terms.

4. Integrated Development Strategy: A long-term Comprehensive Economic Development Plan (CEDP) should be adopted for the Chittagong Hill Tracts, along with area-based small, medium, and short-term development projects. The strategy will focus on achieving economic growth, preserving the environment, and improving the quality of life of local people.

5. Development of connectivity: Apart from the border road construction projects in the three hill districts, public investment should be increased in the development of other roads. With this, the marginal farmers of the remote areas will be able to bring their produce to the market easily, and the possibility of wastage of the produce will be reduced.

6. Establishment of industries and processing centres: Many agricultural products produced here are wasted due to a lack of proper production industries and processing industries. Government initiatives are necessary to establish small and medium manufacturing industries and processing plants for the preservation of fast-growing agricultural products. At the same time, industrial plants should be set up on an urgent basis to fully exploit the production of bamboo, banana, and jackfruit. Setting up a bamboo products manufacturing plant, along with a jackfruit and banana chips and juice factory, will create numerous employment opportunities at the local level, and farmers will receive a fair price for their crops.

7. Development in the tourism sector: Multi-pronged programmes should be taken up for the development of the tourism sector in the three hill areas. Tourism should be developed in a planned manner. If necessary, a master plan should be prepared for the development of the tourism sector. This will reduce the negative impact on the environment. Necessary security should be ensured for domestic and foreign tourists visiting the mountains. Information centres should also be set up at key tourist destinations where tourists can obtain the necessary travel information. Quality hotels, resorts, and restaurants can be set up for tourists with emphasis on local traditional food. It is essential to carry out regular cleaning campaigns in tourist areas and provide modern waste management. Local tribal culture and traditions can be highlighted as a key part of tourism. Emphasising their handicrafts, clothes, and food will attract more tourists.

8. Development of Agriculture: Agriculture is the main occupation of the hills. Essential steps need to be taken for the development of the mountain agriculture system. Cultivation of jhum on the slopes of hills leads to soil erosion. Alternatively, "bench terracing" or terracing and contour farming can be popularised. It can save water and soil. There is a severe water crisis in the mountains. In this case, irrigation can be done using drip irrigation or point irrigation, rainwater harvesting, and modern technology. The use of agricultural machinery like small tractors, reapers, or combine harvesters should be increased according to the nature of the land in the mountains. If the government subsidises these machines, farmers will be interested in using them. Among the cash crops, coffee, malta, cashew nuts, oranges, dragon fruits, and various spices can be emphasised. These crops have high market value and are suitable for a hilly climate and soil. Moreover, there is a need to set up adequate cold storage in the hilly areas to preserve the fruits and vegetables here. This will allow farmers to store their produce for a long time and get a fair price. Agricultural research centres and modern agricultural training centres should be established for the training of farmers.

4. Conclusion

The Chittagong Hill Tracts is a latent force for the national and regional economy of Bangladesh. Its natural resources, agriculture, forestry and immense tourism potential can play an essential role in the overall growth of the country. However, addressing existing challenges is crucial to realising these possibilities. Interpersonal conflicts, land disputes, poor infrastructure, financial crises and institutional inequalities have long held back economic activity in the region. It is necessary to address these issues and ensure a participatory, just and reasonable sustainable development. It should be both an economic goal and a national goal. The political goals of the government, the transparency and functional role of the local administration, the financing of the private sector, and the opportunity for the active participation of the local population are all crucial. Only the active role of all these elements can make the potential of the Chittagong Hill Tracts a reality. If the right policies and plans are adopted and implemented correctly, the Chittagong Hill Tracts will become one of the best economic zones in the country in the next 15 to 20 years. Improving the quality of life of the people of the region and ensuring economic progress will open a new chapter in the overall growth and development of the country.

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