



Nishorgo Support Project

**A SUMMARY REPORT AND IMPACT ON
'PROTECTED AREAS FOR PEOPLE:
WEST BENGAL VISIT BY LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS'**

Task no.:
USAID Contract no.: 388-C-00-03-00050-00



A SUMMARY REPORT AND IMPACT ON 'PROTECTED AREAS FOR PEOPLE: WEST BENGAL VISIT BY LOCAL STAKEHOLDERS'

**Kazi M A Hashem
Training Coordinator**

October, 2005



**Implemented by IRG
With partners: CODEC, NACOM & RDRS**



Table of Content

Table of Content	iii
1. Introduction	1
2. Purpose of the Visit	1
3. Exposure Tour Members Information	1
4. Road to Siliguri.....	2
5. Learning Events.....	2
6. General Observations	3
7. Management of the Team.....	4
8. Management of Perceptions of the Team Members.....	4
9. Return in Dhaka.....	4
10. Meeting at Bon Bhaban.....	4
11. Lessons learnt	5
12. Impact	5
13. Recommendation.....	6
14. Conclusion.....	6
Annex- 1	7

1. Introduction

The co-management of Protected Areas (PA) is recently being implemented in our country. The 'Nishorgo Support Project (NSP) is playing catalytic role for Forest Department (FD) to institutionalize the co-management approach in managing the PAs. NSP has been also instrumental in taking on board overseas experiences in improved natural resource management. As part of this learning, two teams visited West Bengal: first team of two senior officials of NSP & USAID during November 05 – 09, 2003 and the second team comprising seven senior officials (FD 6 & NSP 1) during April 15 – 21, 2004. Based on their recommendations, a third team was visited northern part of West Bengal with 29 members (Stakeholders - 20, FD - 5 & NSP - 4) during June 15 – 22, 2005.

The following describes the West Bengal summery trip report visit made by the third team.

2. Purpose of the Visit

“Seeing is believing” and so an exposure visit primarily for the stakeholders of NSP, was planned and executed based on the experiences of the previous two exploratory trips (it is obvious that the stakeholders are crucial to co-management of PAs and the demonstration effect of this visit would have greater impact in PA co-management).

The exposure visit named as “*Protected Areas for People: West Bengal Visit by Local Stakeholders*” was conducted by the Centre for Biosocial Advancement (CBA) with main purpose as follows:

- Visit sites where co-management of PAs in West Bengal is currently being employed as a tool for improved conservation and management.
- Learn lessons from these site cases.
- Meet with key officials/professionals in West Bengal, who have worked on PA co-management attempts, and draw lessons learned for Bangladesh.
- Expose local community-members in Bangladesh co-management pilots to the co-management activities in India and facilitate their interaction with counterpart community in West Bengal.

3. Exposure Tour Members Information

The team comprised 29 members (20 local participants, 5 Beat Officers and 4 NSP staff (Annex # 1).

The categories of stakeholders are shown below:

Category	Number
North Region	
UP Chairman	3
Union Parishad Women Member	2
Tribal People (including One Headman)	2
Social Worker	5
Sub-Total	12
South Region	
UP Chairman	1
Municipality Chairman	1
Union Parishad Women Member	1

Social Worker	5
Sub-Total	8
Total	20

Four NSP staff members included M/s. Tariqul Islam, Field Coordinator of Northern Region; Hanif Khan, Regional Coordinator of Southern Region; Dhruva Kanta Kundu, Participatory Monitoring Officer of Northern Region and Kazi M A Hashem, Training Coordinator.

4. Road to Siliguri

The team started journey at 21:00 hours on June 15, 2005 by boarding Shyamoli Bus at Kamlapur, Dhaka. We waited for around 3:00 hours at Tista Bridge as due to rains the bridge was closed on June 16, 2005 for its repair and maintenance activities. The team reached at Burimari (Bangladesh) check post at around 11:00 hours. After reaching the Chengrabandha (India) check post all of us completed due formalities and arrived at Mainak Tourist Lodge, Siliguri at about 16:00 hours.

5. Learning Events

As we were late to arrive there, it was not possible to follow the program scheduled for June 16. The places visited by the NSP team during June 16 – 21, 2005 are described as follows:

- 16th. Visited Nature Interpretation Center & observed Wildlife Museum at *Sukna* of *Mahananda* Wildlife Sanctuary, Darjeeling in the evening. Forest Department official (DFO) briefed the team about *Mahananda* Wildlife Sanctuary.
- Stayed at night in Mainak Tourist Lodge, Siliguri.
- 17th. Started for Darjeeling at around 08:30 hours and interacted with Eco-Development Committee (EDC) at *Jorebunglow* in *Sanchael* Wildlife Sanctuary, Darjeeling. Concerned Range Officer and his colleagues organized the event. In the afternoon visited *Padmaja Naidu* Himalayan Zoological Park, followed by an interaction meeting with the Zoo authority.
- Stayed at night at Hotel Ascot, Darjeeling.
- 18th. Started at around 9:00 hours and visited Rabindranath Tagore's Museum at *Mungpoo* on the way to *Madarihat* in Jalpaigury district.
- Visited *Kunjanagar* Eco-Tourism Park and interacted with EDC members; DCF and his colleagues of Forest Department accompanied us until 24:00 hrs.
- Stayed at night in Jaldapara Tourist Lodge, Madarihat.
- 19th. Visited *Buxa* Tiger Reserve and interacted with the Forest Protection Committees (FPC) and the Self Help Groups (SHG) at *Chipra* and *Panialgury*. The team interacted with Field Director, Divisional Forest Officials and others concerned FD staffs while walking and attending the meetings.
- Stayed at night in Jaldapara Tourist Lodge, Madarihat.

20th. Interacted with EDC at *Khowchangpara* under *Jaldapara* Wildlife Sanctuary and visited *Jaldapara* Wildlife Sanctuary along with the DCF. Here we observed a Rhino, a herd of elephant, barking deer's, peacocks, etc.

➤ Started for Siliguri and stayed at night at Mainak Tourist Lodge.

21st. Visited Eco-Tourism Park at 5th mile under *Baikunthapur* Division. Interacted with a FPC involved in conservation efforts of Forest Department.

The team organized a reflection discussion and cultural function for about four hours from 21:30 hours (on 19th) to 1:30 hours (on 20th) at Jaldapara Tourist Lodge. All the team members expressed their feelings and observations of the exposure visit, and also performed entertaining events.

6. General Observations

- i. The Forest Department prepared protected area management plan by involving community people living in and around the protected area. They develop annual plans and implement accordingly.
- ii. Identification of buffer zone and management of buffer zone plantations surrounding the protected area for protecting the core areas is key to success. Implementation of income generation activities lessen dependency on protected areas.
- iii. Eco-Development Committees (EDC) have been formed in different places, where scenic beauty or any other special attraction or significant themes are available. Number of members of an EDC depends on the location and command area. Necessary infrastructures (e.g. construction of road/trail, boundary, picnic spot, garage, ticket counter, sitting arrangement/chair, boat, etc.) for developing and supporting eco-tourism have been developed with financing from Forest Department. These infrastructures have been transferred to the EDCs for their use and management. EDCs have their own bank account and the members can borrow money from the EDC fund. They have created jobs like eco-tour guide, boatman, ticket seller, garage guard, labor selling at picnic parties, spot keeper, shopkeeper, transport labor, hotel/rest house boy, cook, rickshaw/van puller, cleaner, laundryman, etc.
- iv. Forest Protection Committees (FPC) are formed in the areas, which are less attractive for eco-tourism. FPC is also constituted by the community people, who live in and around the area. A FPC provides information and support to the Forest Department for forest protection. FPC receives some benefits from Forest Department (vegetable gardening at the open spaces in the forest, mushroom cultivation, labor selling provision for afforestation to the Forest Department, partner in new plantation schemes, bi-products derived from thinning forest, fuel wood, different occupational training e.g. fish culture, vegetable cultivation, mushroom cultivation, livestock rearing, apiculture, handicraft, etc.). A FPC has its own fund and bank account and the members can borrow money from the fund.
- v. Self Help Groups (SHG) have been formed in some protected areas (in landscape zones). Generally the women are the members of such groups who help in forest protection. They organize weekly meetings for saving money on weekly basis. They borrow money from their fund, particularly when an emergency arises.

7. Management of the Team

- Among the four NSP staff members Mr. Tariqul coordinated the Northern Region team; Mr. Hanif coordinated the Southern Region team; Mr. Shymol Roy, Beat Officer of FD coordinated the Beat Officers team; Mr. Dhruva took video pictures of the necessary events of the trip and Mr. Hashem performed the role as Team Leader.
- An orientation meeting was organized for the team at the waiting room of Burimari Check Post. Team Leader facilitated the meeting where each team member acquainted with others, explained about the purpose and activities of visit and roles and responsibilities to be performed as a team member.
- The CBA consultant Mr. M. S. Rai received the team from Shyamoli bus stand in Siliguri on 16th and guided up to 17th in Darjeeling. Dr. Pranabes Sanyal joined the team at *Jorebunglow* in *Sanchael* Wildlife Sanctuary on 17th and continued up to last day of the trip. The team felt good with appropriate support from Dr. Sanyal.
- The reflection/discussion and cultural event at Jaldapara Tourist Lodge on 19th helped the team members to reinforce their learning.

8. Managing of Perceptions of the Team Members

The following perceptual problems were resolved during the visit:

- A few of the team members had perception that the per diem given to each of the individuals is for their personal expenses (except food and lodging cost). However, they got convinced and paid the food and accommodation expenses.
- A team member (northern stakeholder) showed a copy of northern region's Exposure Visit Budget with claim that they had not received the money for making passport. The person, however, understood the concept of budget and actual expenses after explanation of NSP staff.

9. Return Dhaka

The team started from Siliguri at 14:00 hours on June 21 and arrived at Dhaka at 05:30 hours on June 22nd. They refreshed at a local hotel for attending meeting with senior officials of FD at Ban Bhaban (at 9:00 hours).

10. Meeting at Bon Bhaban

On the morning of 22nd June, Nishorgo Support Project arranged a seminar where Mr. M. Anwarul Islam, Chief Conservator of Forests, and other senior Forest Officials listened from the Stakeholders of their experiences and suggestions as to how to apply their learning in Bangladesh's context. One UP Chairman from Teknaf Game Reserve recapitulated his experience as "we are better off than what Buxa Tiger Reserve at Shiliguri was initially and we can successfully turn Teknaf into an eco-tourism center for conservation." Another UP Chairman from Chunarughat, Habiganj pledged that after returning they will personally take care that illegal felling in his area stops and so will assist Nishorgo Support Project to conserve the Protected Areas. A woman member commented that "*if the women in West Bengal can come forward despite the obstruction from family and motivate their husbands then so can we. Our forests belong to ourselves and we will save them.*" Chief Conservator of Forests Mr. M. Anwarul Islam commented that we should sustain this commitment and the local community and the Forest Department together should work for Protected Forest Area Conservation. Among others the seminar was attended by Mr. Osman Gani, Deputy Chief Conservator of

Forests, Mr. Shamsuddin, Deputy Chief Conservator of Forests, Mr. Monoj Kanti Roy, Conservator of Forests and National Coordinator, Nishorgo Support Project, Mr. Ali Kabir Haidar, Conservator of Forests, Central Circle, Mr. Shamsur Rahman, Conservator of Forests, Wildlife & Nature Conservation. From Nishorgo Support Project Mr. Philip J. DeCosse, Chief of Party, Mr. Ram Sharma, Protected Area Management Specialist, Dr. Khawja Shamsul Huda, Local Governance and Capacity Specialist and Ms. Mehrin A. Mahbub, Communication Specialist were also present.

11. Lessons learnt

The team members were actively engaged in observing protected area management activities interacting with local communities and involved alternative income generation activities. The team expressed their learning in different ways as clear from the followings:

- To conserve biodiversity there is no better alternative than participation of community people.
- Development of eco-tourism is one of the best alternatives to protected area conservation.
- Users' group development (self help group development) strengthens forest conservation as well raises the living standard of the community people.
- To conserve biodiversity, transparent and patriotic Forest Department official placement in the protected areas is required.
- Continued mobilization and motivation in and around protected areas is essential to protect biodiversity.

12. Impact

Reflecting at the lessons learnt and commitment made at the Ban Bhaban meeting by the participants of West Bengal trip, the following impacts are identified in the concerned regions:

Mr. Tariqul Islam, Field Coordinator, Northern Region perceived their changed behavior after coming back from West Bengal as all of them were found very active in conserving forest at their respective sites. Generally they organized meeting at their community level. The Chairman and Members also discussed at Union Parishad meetings and suggested the other Parishad members to take immediate steps in their areas to halt illicit tree felling. NSP officials attended some those meetings and were represented. Some of them also are made press conferences where journalist association was represented. Besides, the participants are also cooperating NSP staff as and when necessary. In fact, all the visitors reflected their positive attitudes.

Mr. Hanif Khan, Regional Coordinator, Southern Region opined that the visiting members shared their exposure visit experiences by organizing concerned communities. The UP Chairman, Whykong shared his experiences in Upazila Coordination Committee meeting and Union Parishad meeting. The participants also are cooperating NSP staff as and when necessary. The visitors have developed positive attitudes for biodiversity conservation.

On the questions 'Are some of them more active? Which ones? Can you cite examples?' Mr. Tariqul responded that yes, some of them are very active, particularly Deworagatch Union

Parishad Chairman Mr. Abu Taher. He always co-operates with NSP staff and attends our functions at Satchari National Park.

At Lowachara National Park Mr. Gidison Prodhan Shu Shiang, the Khasia ethnic group Headman is taking keen interest on protecting forests. He especially recruited six people with paid patrolling from his own community contribution.

Similarly Mr. Hanif answered that among eight stakeholders five are found more active (Bilkis Akhter, Mohammad Hossain, Anwar Kamal, Mamtaz Ahmed Chowdhury and Rashid Ahmed). Principal Maulana Nur Ahmed Anwary and Abul Hashem are also active. They inspire co-management council members by sharing West Bengal experiences and attend zone wise and user group meetings.

M/s. Tariqul and Hanif observed that the field staffs are very happy because they are getting full cooperation and support from the community. Mr. Tariqul is confident that he would be able to make community patrolling a reality.

13. Recommendation

On the questions ‘Should we do it again? Should we bring some of the Indians down here to Bangladesh? What was discussed?’ the Northern and Southern region staff responded as follows:

Mr. Tariqul recommends ‘Yes’ for further visiting West Bengal but he commented that the selection of the participants should be done very cautiously.

M/s. Goutam and Hanif opined that more such visits may be organized (including the teachers, Journalists, FD officials, Site Facilitators, etc.).

All recommended that we can also invite the Indians, but not now as it would be better if we make our co-management councils functioning and improve livelihoods of local stakeholders through alternative income generation activities.

14. Conclusion

One of the guiding factors for this trip was a right selection of a visiting place adjacent to our country. The selection of local stakeholders was indeed unique. This was a co learning process as the key community stakeholders, Forest Department implementing officials and NSP staff members constituted the team together. All felt that community should be mobilized and empowered so that they will be able to support and conserve biodiversity. The mechanism and kind of support provided by the West Bengal Forest Department to create alternative income generation activities including eco-tourism is similar in our context.

As they were exposed to other country with similar settings, the West Bengal experience gave them an impression of dignity with significant positive impacts.

The Forest Department officials learned as to how the West Bengal Forest Department is conserving biodiversity across the border and can indeed be more proactive to empower local community in future.

Annex- 1

Tour Members Information

Sl.	Name	Work	Address
A. Stakeholders: Northern Region			
1.	Md. Abu Taher	UP Chairman	Chunarughat, Habiganj
2.	Md. Ayub Ali Talukdar	UP Chairman	Chunarughat, Habiganj
3.	Md. Abdur Razzak	UP Chairman	Madhabpur, Habiganj
4.	Shafia Khatun	UP Member	Chunarughat, Habiganj
5.	Ferdausi Beagum	UP Member	Chunarughat, Habiganj
6.	Gidison Prodhan Shu Chiang	Khasia HeadMan	Srimangal, Moulavibazar
7.	Nurul Momin Chowdhury	Businessman	Chunarughat, Habiganj
8.	Moshahid Ahmed	Ex UP Member	Kamolganj, Moulavibazar
9.	Sarforaj Ali Babul	Ex Municipality Commissioner	Srimangal, Moulavibazar
10.	Shymol Dev Barma	Eco Tour Guide	Srimangal, Moulavibazar
11.	Md. Humayun A. Kabir	Businessman	
12.	Md. Aminul Islam	Private Service	Chunarughat, Habiganj
B. Stakeholders: Southern Region			
13.	Md. Kamrul Islam Hossaini	Municipality Chairman	Banskhali, Chittagong
14.	Principal Maulana Nur Ahmed Anwary	UP Chairman	Teknaf, Cox's Bazar
15.	Bilkis Akhter	UP Member	Teknaf, Cox's Bazar
16.	Mamtaz Ahmed Chowdhury	Businessman	Teknaf, Cox's Bazar
17.	Md. Abul Hashem	Businessman	Teknaf, Cox's Bazar
18.	Rashid Ahmed	Businessman	Chakaria, Cox's Bazar
19.	Mohammed Hossain	Private Service	Lohagara, Chittagong
20.	Anwar Kamal	Businessman	Lohagara, Chittagong
C. Forest Department			
21.	Md. Amirul Hasan	Beat Officer	Harbang, Chittagong
22.	Md. Abu Yunus	Beat Officer	Satchari, Habiganj
23.	Md. Anawar Hossain Khan	Beat Officer	Rajkandi, Maulavibazar
24.	Shymol Roy	Beat Officer	Srimangal, Maulavibazar
25.	Birendra Nath	Beat Officer	Raikhong, Cox's Bazar
D. Nishorgo Support Project			
26.	Md. Tariqul Islam	Field Coordinator	NSP/RDRS, Srimangal
27.	Md. Hanif Khan	Regional Coordinator	NSP/CODEC, Cox's Bazar
28.	Dhruba Kanti Kunda	Participatory Monitoring Officer	NSP/NACOM, Srimangal
29.	Kazi M A Hashem	Training Coordinator	NSP/IRG, Dhaka